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Hints on billiards

Joseph Charles Kimball

HINTS ON BILLIARDS.

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HINTS ON
BILLIARDS
3439

BY
J. P. BUCHANAN

WITH THIRTY-SIX DIAGRAMS



LONDON
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PREFACE.

IT may be as well to explain briefly the *raison d'être* of this modest volume.

“Billiards,” by Joseph Bennett (ex-Champion), edited by the well-known “Cavendish,” is universally admitted to be a standard work. It is, however, written for those amateurs who either possess tables of their own, with time and inclination to practise, or who care to hire club or public tables at regular intervals for the purposes of practising, the “set” strokes mathematically laid down therein.

These two classes of players are naturally in a very great minority. There is another, and a far larger, class who are content to devote a few hours a week to the game, purely as a

recreation, and perhaps never dream of having an hour's practice apart from actual play in a game, or of entering upon the drudgery which such practice entails. At the same time, they would like to have a knowledge of the theories or elements of Billiards, and to have some of their early difficulties smoothed over for them. To such players—novices, or, at the most, ordinary amateurs—this work is addressed.

In my instructions I have tried to be clear, concise, and comprehensive. At the same time, I have purposely repeated my advice with regard to several particularly important points in the game, in order to emphasize them.

My best thanks are due to Mr. Martin H. Hall, architect and surveyor, Rugby, who has rendered me exceedingly kind and valuable assistance with the diagrams.

JOHN PENRUDDOCKE BUCHANAN.

January, 1895.

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HINTS ON BILLIARDS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TABLE.

As frequent reference will have to be made to the various parts of the table under their technical names, it seems advisable, in order to avoid all possible mistakes, to give these names, together with an explanatory diagram.

The surface of the table inside the wood-work of the cushions is 12 ft. by 6 ft. $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. The cushions themselves are each about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. in width, which leaves the actual playing space on the table 11 ft. 9 in. by 5 ft. $10\frac{1}{2}$ in.

The table thus consists of two equal squares, whose sides measure 5 ft. $10\frac{1}{2}$ in.

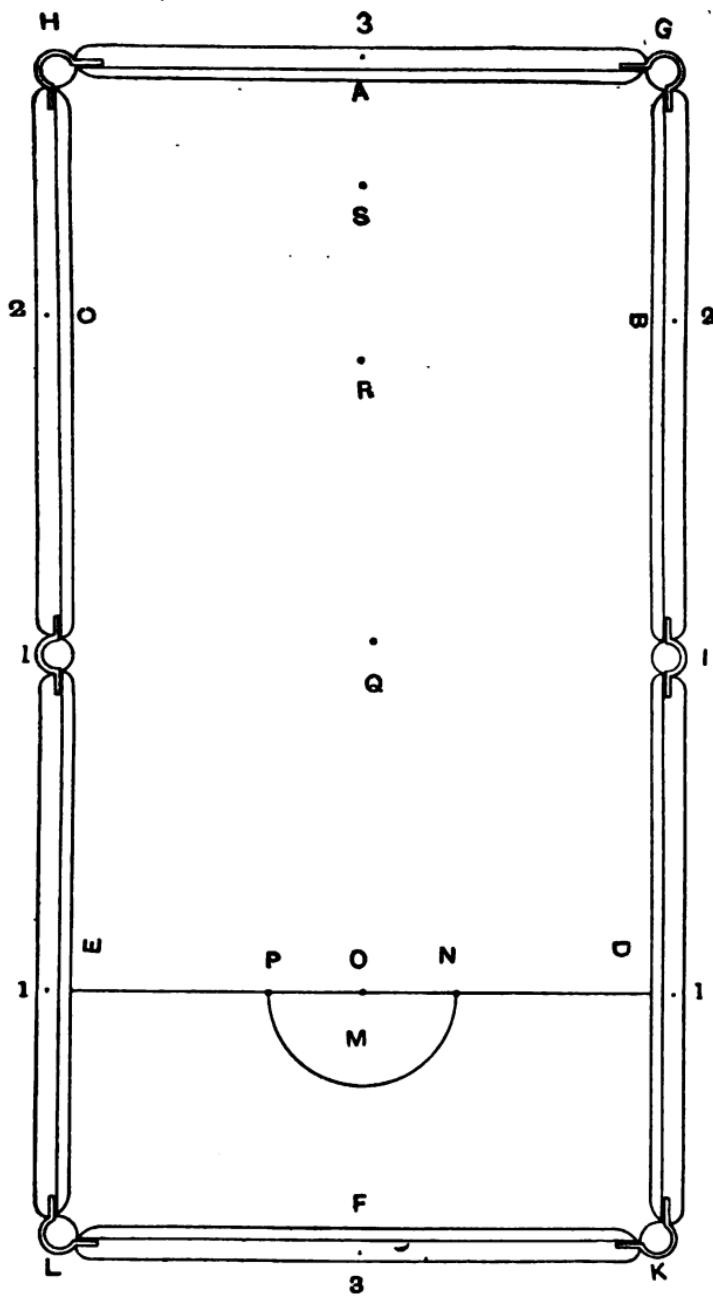
The part of the table adjacent to the spot

S in diagram 1 is known as the "top" of the table, whilst the other, or baulk, end is the "bottom." Hence, of course, the terms "up" and "down" the table apply to the direction of the ball towards the top and bottom cushions respectively, and in the same connection the terms "above" and "below" are used.

In diagram 1, which represents the table :

- A* is the top cushion.
- B* is the right-hand side top cushion.
- C* is the left-hand side bottom cushion.
- D* is the right-hand side bottom cushion.
- E* is the left-hand side bottom cushion.
- F* is the bottom cushion.
- G* is the right-hand top pocket.
- H* is the left-hand top pocket.
- I* is the right-hand middle-pocket.
- J* is the left-hand middle pocket.
- K* is the right-hand bottom pocket.
- L* is the left-hand bottom pocket.
- M* is the baulk semicircle, or *D*.
- N* is the right-hand spot in baulk.
- O* is the middle spot in baulk.
- P* is the left-hand spot in baulk.
- Q* is the middle spot.
- R* is the pyramid spot.
- S* is the red spot, or spot.

DIAGRAM I.



M, the baulk circle, or *D*, is drawn with a radius of $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches; consequently its diameter *NP* is 23 inches.

The Spots. *Q*, the middle spot, is in the centre of the table.

R, the pyramid spot, so called because it forms the apex of the triangle formed by the pyramid balls, is placed where lines joining the opposite top and middle pockets intersect.

S, the red spot, or spot, is placed $12\frac{3}{4}$ inches from the face of the top cushion.

The little spots let into the woodwork of the table, marked 1, 2, and 3 in the diagram, are called "cushion spots." Those marked 1 and 2 are meant to facilitate the marking of the baulk line, whilst those marked 3 determine the centre line of the table on which the spots are placed.

Drawing the baulk line.

The baulk line, which passes through the spots *N*, *O*, and *P*, is now drawn, by the

Rules of the Billiard Association, 29 inches from the face of the bottom cushion, but formerly it used to be drawn $28\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the face of that cushion. Players who possess old tables must bear this alteration in mind when marking their baulk line, and the line must be drawn half-an-inch, and in some cases more, above the cushion spots marked 1 in the diagram.

The foregoing diagram of the table, and the others which follow, are drawn exactly to scale, which scale is shown at the foot of each diagram.

Explanation
of diagrams.

In all these diagrams the plain ball is always the striker's ball.

The dotted lines show the direction of the striker's ball, whilst the plain lines show the direction taken by the object-ball or balls.

CHAPTER II.

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF AIMING.

Practice not
theory essen-
tial.

BEFORE entering on the subject of this chapter, it may not be out of place to impress upon the reader that it is impossible to learn solely from *any* book how to play Billiards.

Even a thorough knowledge of the real theories of the game is practically useless, unless that knowledge is accompanied by persistent and intelligent practice in accordance with those theories. While I shall try to explain those theories of which a knowledge is really requisite, the chief aim in these pages will be to give thoroughly sound and practical advice which shall ground be-

ginners in the first and all-important principles of the game.

Though the game in its way involves a good deal of head work and judgment, chiefly with regard to position play, no amount of theoretical knowledge of dynamics, mathematics, or geometry will be of the slightest avail in promoting practical skill in it. It is purely a game of manual dexterity, and the head work comes in, not in remembering a lot of scientific *formulæ*, or in making abstruse mental calculations, but in controlling the will and the mind, and making the hand, eye, and arm obey the will and act in perfect unity together.

It may be useful, however, to remember that Billiards is perhaps the most complete exposition of the truth of the laws of motion and friction extant. Hence I would point out to the student that every single different

division of the balls, every modification of screw or side, and, in very many cases, of strength, will give rise to a different result.

All these infinite (for they are nothing else) motions cannot possibly be made a subject of memory, or calculated in any scientific fashion. Although in every single stroke the "*coefficient of dynamical friction*"—to use a scientific term—must be calculated, and that too, to a nicety, it is to be calculated, not by any mental process, but, so far as the stroke alone (and not position) is concerned, entirely by the *eye*.

Aiming.

In no work on Billiards have I ever seen the real theory and practice of aiming briefly and clearly explained. The late William Cook (ex-champion), in his admirable book entirely ignores the subject, so far as regards the relation of the line of aim with the points of contact. There is, however, nothing extra-

ordinary in the fact that such a great player should fail to see any possible difficulty for beginners in what had never been to him, from his earliest years, the cause of the slightest doubt.

That aiming *is* a source of difficulty with many players I am certain. I recollect a really good amateur player, capable of his occasional seventy break, telling me that he was absolutely unable to make certain of any easy winning hazard. Now he was a fine cannon and losing hazard player, but every simple "winner" seemed impossible to him. This was simply because he did not know how to aim.

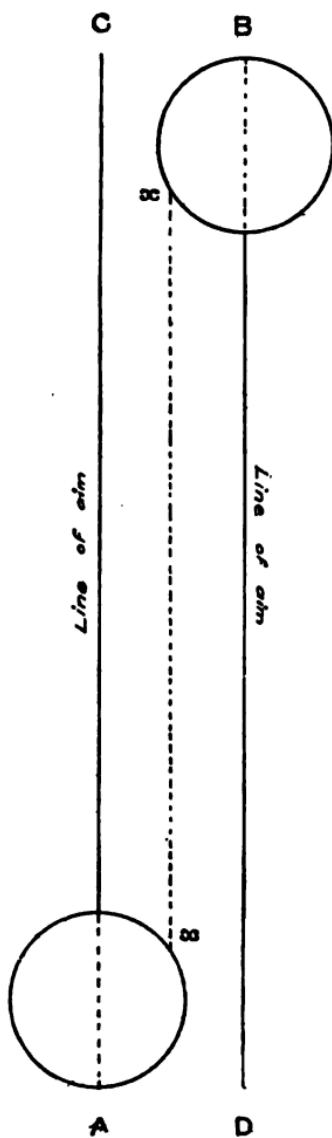
Before explaining how to aim in actual practice, it will be well to explain the theory of the relation of the *points of contact* to the *line of aim*, not that it is at all necessary for a "player" to bear it in mind, but because the

The theory of
aiming.

explanation of this theory may help the *beginner* to grasp the following instructions on aiming. This theory, while extremely simple, is a very beautiful one, and perhaps will be better understood from the cut on the next page than from my description in words.

The balls are perfect spheres of exactly equal size. Therefore, they will come into collision in exactly the same place, whether one is aimed at a certain part of the other, or whether that other ball is aimed at an exactly corresponding part of the first.

We will suppose that, in order to make a certain stroke, it is necessary for the striker, hitting his own ball *A* in the middle, to point his cue in the direction of point *C* off ball *B*. The balls will come into contact in exactly the same place as they would if the ball *B*, struck in the middle, were propelled in the direction of point *D* off ball *A*, the line of aim



B D bearing exactly the same relation to ball *A* as the line of aim *A C* bears to ball *B*. As will be seen in the cut, the points of contact *x x* on both balls lie in a straight line drawn *exactly half-way between and parallel to* the two lines of aim *A C* and *B D*, and this is the relation of the points of contact to the line of aim *in every case*.

Deductions
from above
theory.

The above theory clearly shows us three things: *First*, that one never, except (as is obvious) in the case of a full ball, hits the object-ball in the place one aims at.

This would seem, in theory, to imply great difficulty in the matter of aim. But we learn (and this knowledge may give us a guide to the really practical way of aiming) *secondly*, that *under all circumstances* the points of contact hold exactly the same relation to the line of aim; and, *thirdly*, that the points of contact are absolutely identical and corresponding

points on the two sides of the two balls that meet each other. This can very plainly be seen from the foregoing cut. We can, therefore, argue from the last two *data*, that there must be some uniform way of aiming—and this is the case.

To put it very briefly. You need never, in any stroke on the table, puzzle yourself as to where you ought to *hit* the object-ball; you need only concern yourself as to where you have to *aim*. What you must think of in aiming—whether the stroke is a losing hazard, fine or full, a winning hazard, fine or full, a run-through stroke, a screw, or a side stroke—is simply this, “Is my cue pointing in exactly the right direction to accomplish my stroke?” and, “Am I pointing my cue not only in the right direction, but also at the right spot on *my own ball*? Directly my eye shows me that this is the case, then I can strike my ball.”

The practice
of aiming.

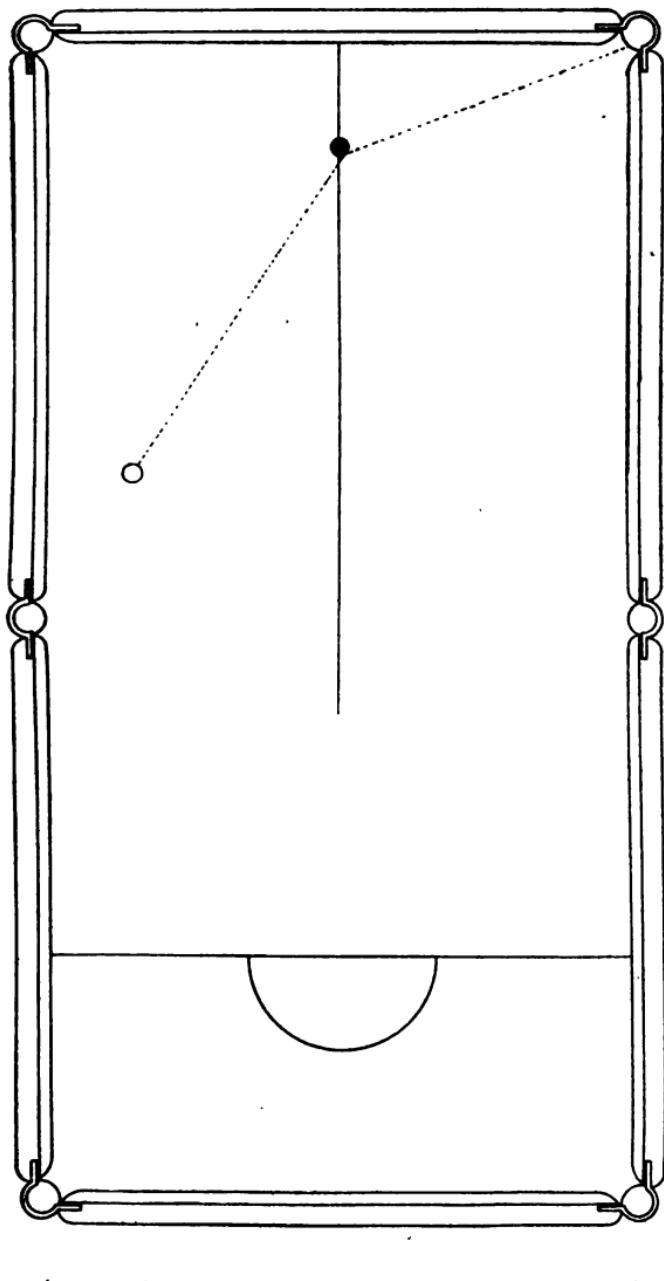
Think only of
direction of
aim.

And mind, you have only to think of the *direction* in which your cue must point, and not try to find a point on the object-ball to aim at. This is important.

Example.

A very simple example of how to aim is shown in diagram 2, where the red ball is on the spot and the white in a line between it and the middle pocket. The stroke is a simple half-ball or natural angle stroke. Here, in order to make the losing hazard into the right top pocket, you have not to puzzle yourself at all as to where you will have to *hit* the red ball. Guided entirely by eye, you will find that you have to *aim in the direction of* the extreme right-hand edge of the red, as shown by the dotted line. It is taken for granted that you are hitting your own ball in the middle, as you should do nine times out of ten in actual play. Similarly, supposing the striker, playing with ball *A* in the cut

DIAGRAM 2.



on page 11, has, for the purposes of the stroke, to aim in the direction of *C*, he has merely to think of the *line of aim A C*, and not at all about the *points of contact x x*. So far I have not, of course, alluded to any thought about *position play*, but have been merely showing the way to aim for the stroke alone. In diagram 2, however, the direction that the red ball should take after the stroke is shown by the plain line.

Look at the
object ball
only.

In making a cannon, do not look from ball to ball, but keep your eye on the *object ball* alone. In making either a winning-hazard or a losing-hazard, do not look at the pocket, but fix your whole attention on the *object-ball*.

In the case of a cannon, you will see the three balls "*focussed*," as it were, in your eye, but your whole attention must be on the *object-ball alone*, and I have no hesitation

whatever in saying that *you must look at the object-ball when you are in the act of striking.* Whatever you do, avoid looking at *your own ball* when striking.

Again, do not pick out a point on the object-ball to aim at, *before* you put your cue down to aim. You cannot do it. You must get down to your stroke before you can really see what you have to do.

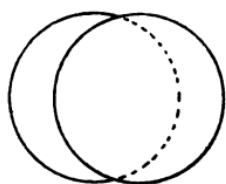
As a rule, the very first aim taken is, though the player himself may be unaware of it, much the best, the hand and eye instinctively doing their work. Amateurs, not knowing this, usually take far too long over their aim. A professional, on the other hand, whilst aiming, thinks *solely* of position and the strength necessary to gain it; he knows that the eye alone will direct his cue almost as accurately as a mathematical instrument. This knowledge, combined with a proper

The first aim
the best.

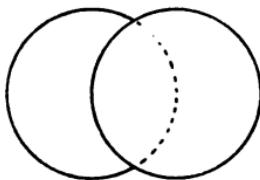
delivery of the cue, judgment of strength and nerve, is the whole secret of success in Billiards.

When you make your bridge, be sure that your thumb is not only exactly opposite to the part of the cue-ball that you intend to strike, but also exactly opposite the part of the object-ball that you intend to aim at.

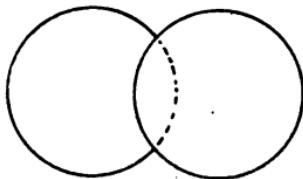
For the purposes of reference only (since, as I have before said, in actual play one can practically make no such division), instances are given in the appended cut of a three-quarter ball stroke, a half-ball stroke, a quarter-ball stroke, and a fine stroke. The term "full ball," of course, explains itself.



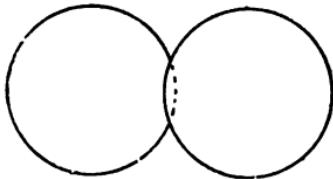
$\frac{3}{4}$ Ball



$\frac{1}{2}$ Ball



$\frac{1}{4}$ Ball



Fine Ball

CHAPTER III.

RUDIMENTS OF THE GAME.

Student must
form good
habits.

IT is most important at the outset to form good habits in such matters as the striker's position at the table, the formation of the bridge, the acquisition of a regular style of aiming, drawing back the cue, and striking the ball. Until the learner has in some measure become master of an easy, regular, confident style of aiming at, and striking, his ball, position play will be out of the question.

Exhibition
match good
lesson.

No better lesson, except an actual lesson from a professional, can be had than is afforded by an exhibition match between two first-class players in the present day, and it is a lesson that may be had very cheaply.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to give

in words alone a correct idea of the proper position for the striker to stand in. William Cook's book is particularly valuable in this connection, because it gives photographs of himself, in the act of striking his ball, under the different conditions that arise in actual play. Some hints, however, on the subject may be found useful.

First, with regard to the method in which the cue should be held. It should certainly not be held by the extreme end of the butt, as is done by so many moderate amateurs and beginners. There should be at least two or three inches clear of the hand, that is, behind it. The player must grasp the cue *lightly* with the thumb and first finger, letting their tips meet below the cue. The second finger should also just meet the thumb, the other fingers also closing, but only very lightly, round the cue.

How to hold
cue.

Fore-arm
must be
perpendicular.

The whole right fore-arm, from the elbow to the thumb and finger below the cue, must be perfectly perpendicular as the cue is put to the ball, and the wrist must not be turned over. In other words, the back of the hand, though of course turned away from the player, must be in a perpendicular position, and not turned up so as to be parallel with the bed of the table. Many players who would be thought stylish do turn up the hand so, but, besides being anything but stylish, this mannerism really interferes with the correct striking of the ball.

Cue must be
horizontal.

It is of great importance, too, that the cue should be held in a horizontal manner, *i.e.* parallel, or very nearly so, with the bed of the table. The cue, as it moves over the wood-work of the cushions, should be within half-an-inch of it for ordinary strokes—that is, as close to it as possible.

The position of the striker is a point of much importance. The left foot should be some eight to twelve inches to the left of the line of aim, and the toe of that foot should be turned slightly in, pointing almost directly to the cue-ball. The right foot should be placed twelve inches to eighteen inches behind the left foot, and almost at right angles to it ; the right heel being almost immediately behind the left heel. The right leg (and this is very important) must be *perfectly rigid* from the hip—in fact, a bit under the body, while the left knee should be bent. The body must bend from the hips forward, and the front of the body should as nearly as possible be presented to the cue, while the head should be turned so as to fully face the ball. A line drawn straight down the middle of the nose to the chin should drop on the cue as it is presented at the cue-ball. To put it

The striker's position.
Keep right leg rigid.

another way, in the act of aiming, the centre of the striker's eyes, his ball, and the object-ball, must be all exactly in a line, the cue working exactly underneath that line, and the right shoulder must be kept high.

The bridge.

The next subject for consideration is the bridge, to be formed, of course, unless the player is left-handed, by the left hand.

This detail is one of very great importance, there being no doubt but that a very great proportion of amateurs play much under the game they should do, because they are unable to make a proper bridge. The easiest way to learn how to make the bridge is to watch a first-class player; but there are some points which are absolutely necessary, and these I can endeavour to put before the reader.

Bridge must
be immovable.

In the first place, the bridge must be *absolutely immovable* during the whole period of aiming and striking, that is, the *whole of the*

hand forming it must be immovable, and not only the thumb over which the cue runs. The left hand should be placed flat on the table, the four fingers having a space of about one-eighth of an inch between each of them, and rather more between the third and little finger. They should then be drawn up towards the striker until the knuckles of the hand are raised as *high as possible* from the table, consistently with the tips of the fingers having a strong downward pressure on the table. Particularly should this pressure be applied by the first and fourth fingers. Of course the fingers must be perfectly straight and stiff, and not bent. The back part of the wrist, and particularly the ball or root of the thumb, must also be pressed *firmly* on the table. Many players are in the habit of raising the ball of the thumb quite off the table, but this practice alone is quite sufficient

Fingers must
be straight.

to prevent anyone from ever becoming a good player.

Position of thumb.

The groove of the bridge can be adapted to the peculiarities of the formation of the thumb in different individuals.

If the thumb is long and flexible, the part of the thumb as far as the joint or middle of it, should be pressed firmly against the forefinger, the top joint not only being raised, but turned outwards as far as possible. This was the bridge that the late William Cook used to make.

If, however, the thumb is short, and is not easily bent outwards, the tip of the thumb should be pressed firmly against the middle joint of the first finger, the joint of the thumb being the outside of the bridge in this instance. This is perhaps the prettiest bridge, but the other, if it can be made, is probably the best, and the choice between the two styles must

depend a great deal on the formation of the hand.

There is a third class of bridge used sometimes by good players, but it cannot be recommended. In this bridge the thumb is altogether held away from the hand, the cue working in the groove between the thumb and first finger. The objection to it is that there is some risk of the thumb's moving, however slightly ; and, as stated above, it is a *sine qua non* that the bridge should be absolutely rigid.

So far we have only been speaking of the bridge adopted for ordinary strokes, but others are requisite in various situations, as when the striker's ball touches a cushion, or, again, when it is too near the cushion to allow of the ordinary bridge being made on the table. Another bridge, too, is very useful in the case of a screw back stroke, and may

sometimes be used with advantage in playing the spot-stroke. That is formed by making a kind of ring of the thumb and first finger. These bridges can hardly be described in words, and a practical lesson from a professional or a really good marker would be worth pages of letterpress.

Length of
bridge.

As regards the distance between the bridge and the striker's ball, there should be about 9 or $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches between *the tips of the fingers* of the left hand and the ball. If the bridge is made nearer to the ball than this, freedom of cue is precluded, and the player's style is cramped—while if it is made further away, he cannot be certain of striking his ball exactly where he wishes.

Delivery of
the cue.

The delivery of the cue is one of the most important points in the whole game. During the act of taking aim, the cue should be drawn backwards and forwards, but not more

than three times. The last time, as a general rule, it should be drawn back very nearly as far as the thumb, and then should be delivered *smoothly* and *deliberately*, without the slightest jerking or digging motion, at the ball. The stroke must really be delivered from the *shoulder*, and it is important to bear in mind that while the cue must not be jerked or thrust at the ball, and though it must be delivered in *as smooth a manner as possible*, yet the ball must be *struck*, and not pushed.

Play from the shoulder.

Perhaps some help will be found in the following suggestions: Do not stop the cue directly it strikes the ball, but strike as if the cue were to *follow on* after the ball; in fact, actually let it follow the ball. The "following-on" motion of the cue is really most important. The ball will not do its work regularly unless it is struck in this

Let the cue follow on.

way, but will have a lifeless rolling way of running, instead of a resistless, forward movement.

In all games of ball I believe this "following-on" to be most essential. The first-rate cricketer, golfer, or lawn-tennis player invariably puts his whole weight behind the ball, and does not check the forward motion of his bat, club, or racquet in the least. So remember to "*play from the shoulder*" and "*let the cue follow on.*"

The "touch."

The important subject of "touch" is a very difficult one to attempt to explain, and yet perhaps nothing is so essential to success as the possession of a really good touch. I would impress upon my readers that the correct way of aiming, the proper delivery of the cue, and the ability to strike a ball correctly, are the first three requisites in a Billiard-player. Having acquired these, he is able to

improve himself, with observation and judgment, in position play.

Perhaps the first thing a novice notices on going to see an exhibition match between two first-rate professionals, is the way in which the ball is struck, and perhaps the ear is the chief medium by which he learns the difference between a ball struck by the average amateur and a ball struck by a first-rate professional. In the amateur's case, the cue makes a dull, heavy sound, as it strikes the cue-ball ; whereas, in the professional's case, a very decided and sharp, crisp crack is heard.

To acquire the requisite touch, something may be done by taking a lesson or lessons from a really good professional, but it is more or less a gift, just like the possession of "hands" on a horse. The beautiful and delicate, in fact the most wonderful, touch owned

by the late ex-champion, William Cook, was, once seen, never to be forgotten.

Ladies and
Billiards.

Many ladies naturally possess a nice touch and, in many instances, a pretty, graceful style. To digress for a moment, it is pleasant to find that the so-called New Woman (in whose existence, as portrayed, I do not believe), not only sails her own yacht, bicycles, and shoots, etc., but is patronizing in rapidly increasing numbers the "fascinating game." Nothing, except perhaps archery and riding, so sets off a pretty figure as Billiards—that is, if the lady has taken care to acquire a correct style.

A new
profession for
ladies.

In connection with the subject of Billiards and *the sex*, I would remark that it has often occurred to me that there is a great opening for lady professionals, who, if really proficient, would earn a huge income. Time will probably supply this want, and it will be interest-

ing to see whether we poor men can hold our own.

To resume seriously the subject of touch. John Roberts's touch. Different, quite different, from the delicate touch of Cook, but equally extraordinary, is the touch possessed by the great master of Billiards, the incomparable John Roberts. All who have not seen him play, are recommended to go and see him at the very earliest opportunity, and, if wishing to master to some extent the great difficulties of touch, to fix their attention intently on him whilst he is in the act of striking. To watch him for half an hour merely striking his own ball, would be a very valuable lesson.

His touch seems an extraordinary mixture of the greatest firmness and resolution and the utmost delicacy. The ball seems bound to do its work, though it may only just have strength to accomplish the object of the

stroke. Not the least noticeable among his strokes is the way in which he puts on drag. He strikes his ball in the most firm and resolute manner, the very sound his cue makes being unlike that made by any other living player. The ball is seen spinning fast up the table. Three parts of the way up the table it appears to be stopping very suddenly. The object-ball is struck, and his ball glides slowly off it into the very centre of the top pocket. The practice of *drag* strokes will perhaps aid the learner more than anything else in the acquisition of a good touch. By drag (which will be explained later on), a ball can be made to run as true as possible, even if it is not itself perfectly true.

Drag and touch.

Apropos of this, I have heard a good story about the Champion from a professional, who was playing an exhibition match with him down in the provinces. Neither player hap-

pened to have brought his own set of balls, and they had to be content with a decidedly "rocky" set. Roberts very quickly grasped the situation, and was soon spinning off his hundreds, whilst my informant, himself one of the finest players in England, was most dissatisfied at the condition of the balls, and complained loudly to his great opponent, saying how very untrue they were.

"Yes," said John Roberts, "they're not quite the thing. You must dig a bit more *bottom* into them."

I really think that Roberts's touch would, make balls, even if almost egg-shaped, run true. What is most to be insisted on is firmness and delicacy combined, but there must be no lack of resolution. The stroke must come from the *shoulder*, and, as before stated; the cue must *follow on* after the ball.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HALF-BALL STROKE.

Half-ball or
Natural-angle
stroke.

THE Half-ball, or Natural-angle stroke, is undoubtedly by far the most important in the whole game, barring only the spot-stroke. The ability to make a moral certainty of this stroke, and to play it with a certain amount of judgment as to strength, practically makes all the difference between a good and a bad player.

In diagram 2 on page 15, the red ball is on the spot. The plain, or cue-ball, is in a direct line between it and the centre of the left middle pocket. This is the position for the true half-ball stroke or natural angle, and this stroke must be mastered before one can hope

to become even a moderate player. The power of making this stroke to a certainty in any part of the table, and of being able to spot one's ball in baulk exactly for it, is of the utmost importance.

The chief reason why this stroke is so important, is because it is the *very easiest* on the table. In every other stroke, without exception, there is one infinitesimal spot only on the surface of the object-ball, which must be struck in order to make a certainty of scoring. In the case of a half-ball stroke, however, the part of the object-ball that can be struck (and the stroke at the same time accomplished), extends over quite an appreciable portion of the surface of that ball. Consequently the player may make a slight error in his aim, and yet score.

Another great reason why this stroke is of such importance, especially to amateur players,

Other reasons for its importance.

is because the position of the striker's ball is, in the case of a successful losing hazard, determined, it being, of course, in one of the pockets. He has, therefore, only to concern himself with the position of the object-ball, which, as a rule, should be the red. The very fact, too, of the striker having, after a successful losing hazard, the privilege of "spotting" his ball anywhere within the baulk circle, or *D*, is in itself a very strong argument in favour of half-ball "losers," as they are termed.

It has been stated that in actual play one can practically make no definite mental division of the balls. Perhaps, however, for one reason, which shall shortly be shown, we must make an exception in the case of a half-ball.

It has been explained in Chapter II. with reference to diagram 2, that, in order to make the losing hazard in the right top pocket, your eye will show you that you have to aim

at the extreme right edge of the red ball. This knowledge, however, that, in order to make a true half-ball stroke, you must aim at the extreme edge of the object-ball, is practically useful for only one reason, but in that connection is of incalculable value. It enables you, when in hand, to spot your ball in the *D* exactly true for a half-ball stroke.

By looking hard at the *edge* of the object-ball, and moving (with your cue) your own ball until it seems to form the correct angle with it and the pocket or third ball, you will gradually learn to spot your ball properly for the natural-angle stroke.

How to
"spot" for
half-ball
stroke.

Suppose, however, this half-ball stroke to be left on in any other part of the table, you must make aiming, as in every other stroke, simply a question of *eye*. The stroke may perhaps be a natural-angle stroke, or you may

have to play somewhat fuller or finer than a half-ball stroke on the object-ball ; but in any case you must let your *eye*, and not your *brain*, determine the direction in which you must aim in order to effect the stroke.

We have gone elaborately into these details, because most books on Billiards insist—and rightly, too,—so vehemently on the great importance of the half-ball stroke, that players who read these works carefully, and at the same time do not get much practice, are apt sometimes to play a half-ball stroke when some other division of the balls is really necessary.

In addition to the points already urged in its favour, there is really quite a range over which the half-ball stroke is not only possible, but easy, at different strengths. Suppose, for instance, the plain ball in diagram 2 were moved slightly to the left of the spot it

occupies, the "loser" would still be a half-ball stroke, requiring only the plain ball to be struck high with gentle strength. If, again, it were even several inches to the right—the red, of course, still being on the spot—the stroke would be equally a half-ball stroke, but greater strength would be necessary.

This stroke shown in diagram 2, the true half-ball stroke, can very often be played with different degrees of strength, which is another great advantage. If it is played hard, the striker's ball must be struck very high, as, struck so, the ball will have a tendency to curl round quickly into the pocket. If it is played slowly, the cue-ball must be struck dead in the centre. In both cases the cue must follow on.

Strength can be varied.

As a rule, to which there are a few exceptions for the sake of position (instances of which shall presently be given), the player,

when in hand, should spot his ball in baulk for a half-ball stroke.

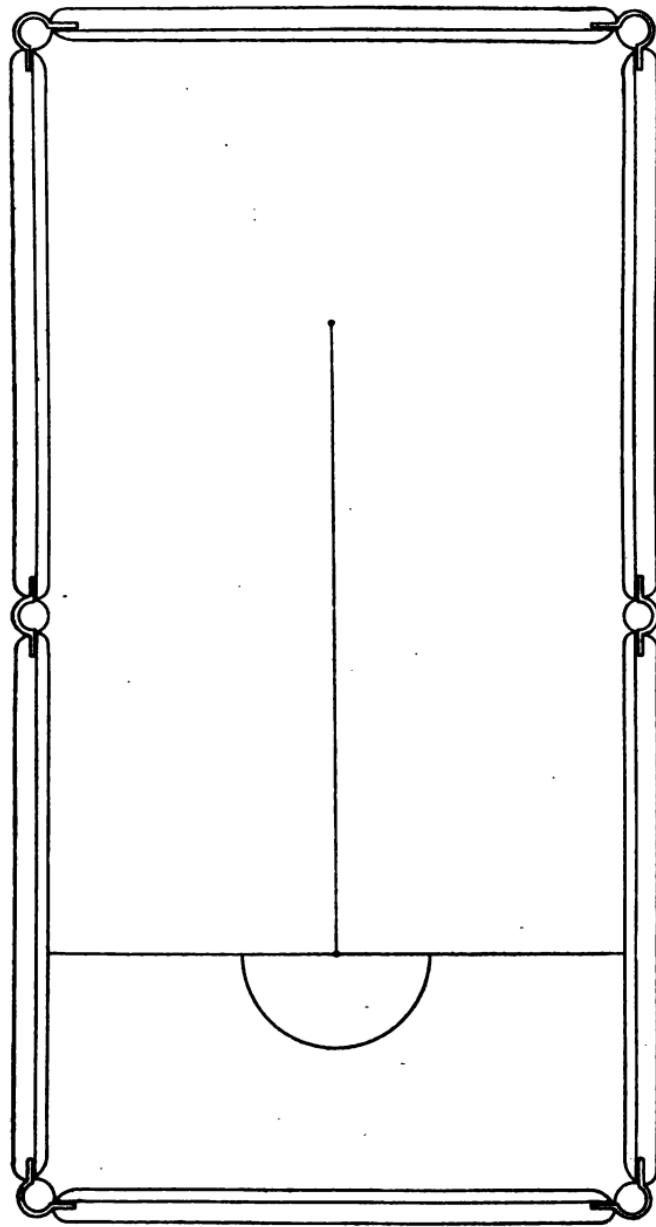
Bring the object-ball into centre of table.

When a player has a losing hazard "on," into one of the top or middle pockets, his idea should be to play the stroke so as to bring the object-ball as near as possible to a line drawn, roughly speaking, from the pyramid spot to the centre spot in baulk. In diagram 3 this line is so drawn, for this idea of leaving position is of great importance. Anyone possessing a table of his own, who will draw this line with pipeclay and endeavour to play in the manner pointed out, is bound to improve his game.

Keep object-ball away from cushions.

I would wish particularly to impress upon players the great importance of being able to make these simple hazards with some idea of position. In a break of losing hazards from baulk, the main idea should be, not so much where to leave the red ball as where not to

DIAGRAM 3.

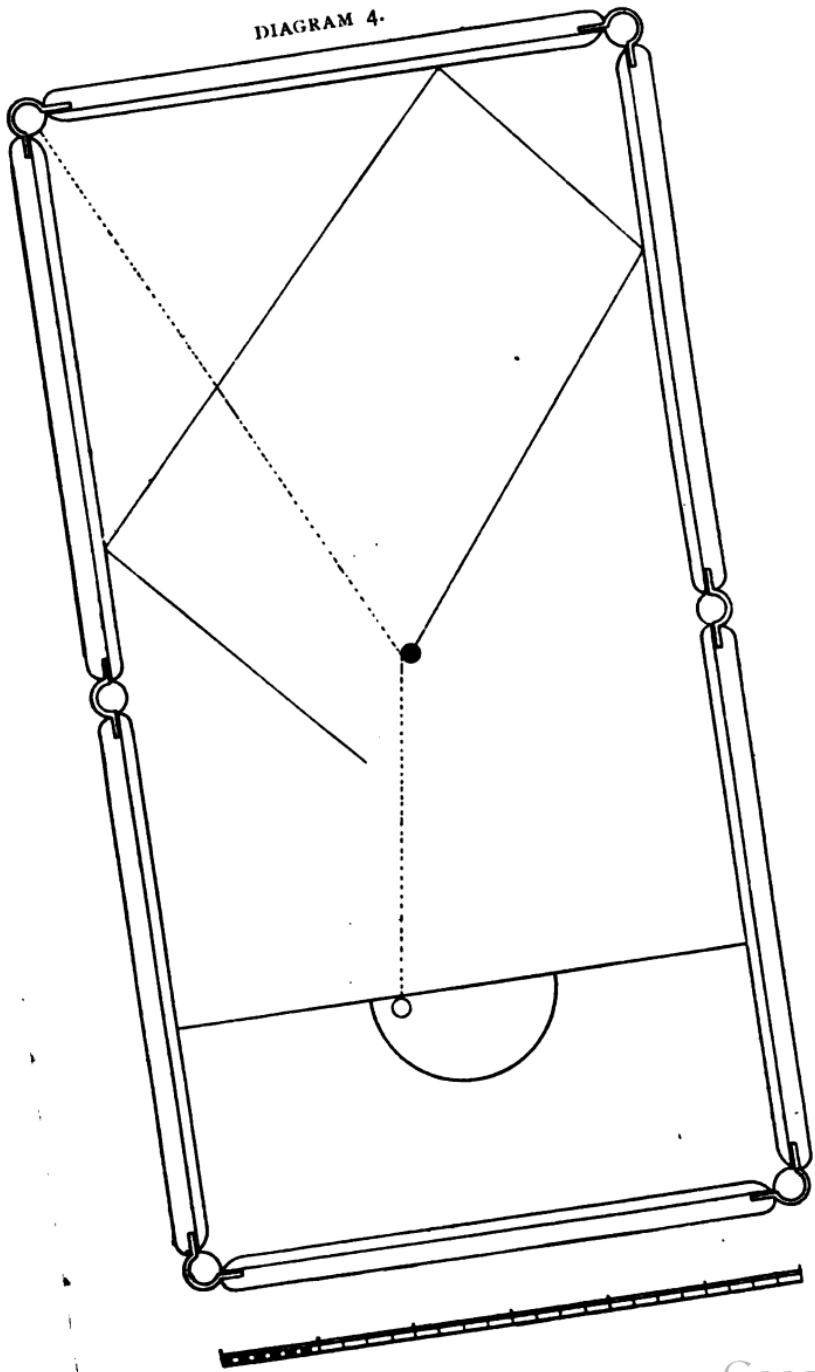


leave it, and the closer it is left to the line running down the centre of the table the better will be the play. Remember, however, at all events, to keep the object-ball away from the cushions. It is really far more important for a player to make certain even of his three or four losing hazards from baulk with position, than to be able occasionally to succeed in making some so-called wonderful screw stroke or fancy stroke.

Long losers.

Let us take what are called *long* losing hazards—namely, those in the top pockets. First of all, we will place the red ball on the centre spot. Now, to make the losing hazard in the top pocket successfully, the white ball should, if spotted on the baulk line, be placed some $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the centre spot in baulk. The stroke must be played freely, the ball being hit just above the centre. The red ball, if struck a true half-ball, according to our

DIAGRAM 4.

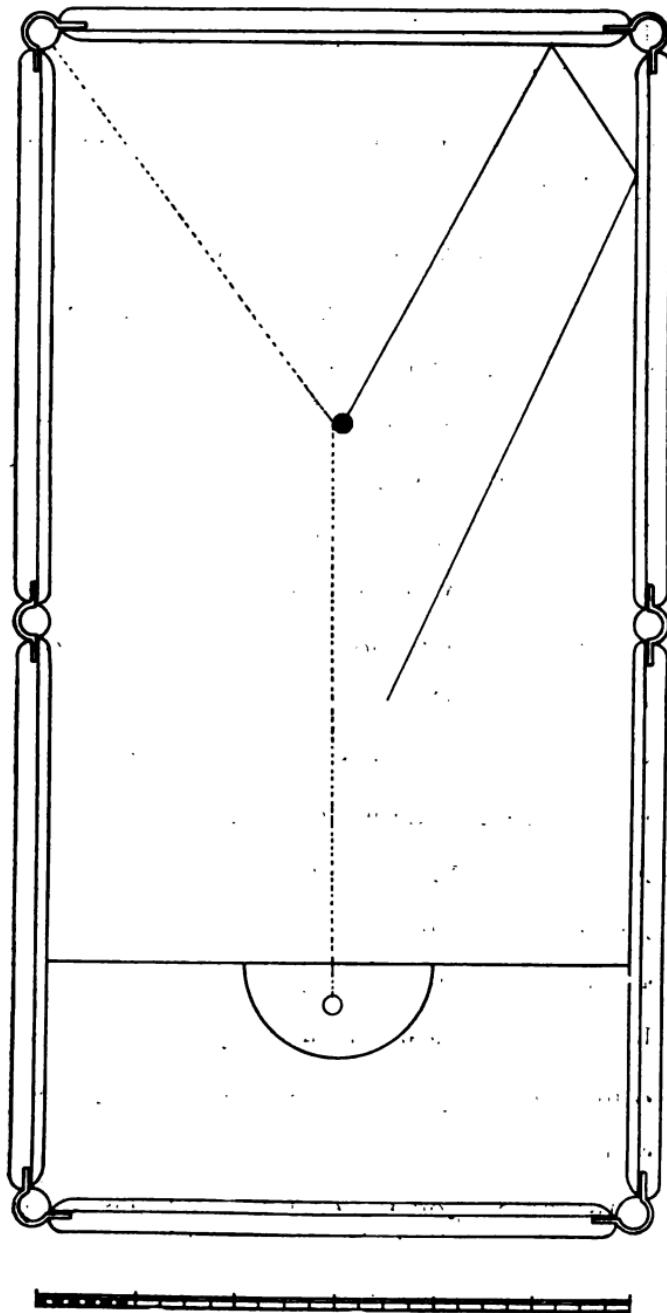


directions, should follow the course shown in diagram 4. It is comparatively easy to leave it near the centre line of the table below the middle pockets, whereas it would take exceedingly nice judgment to leave it in a desirable position above them.

As we put the red nearer to the pyramid spot, we shall find that the red ball, instead of striking the side cushion first, will strike the top cushion, as in diagram 5. It is not necessary then to play with such strength as in the stroke last described, as the red ball, coming off the top and side cushions, will, without having to travel so far, come towards the centre line of the table.

These are, as a rule, the only two strokes to be employed when the ball is between the middle spot and the pyramid spot; but there is a stroke in this connection that, for the

DIAGRAM 5.

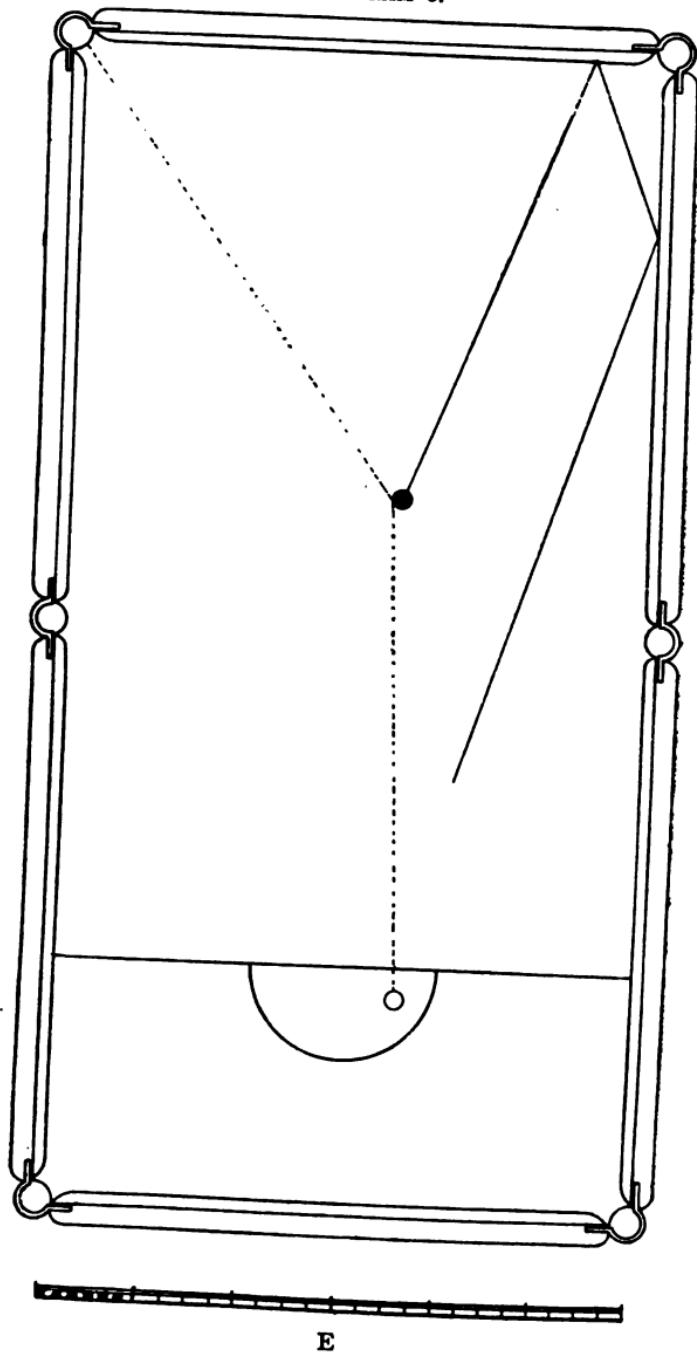


sake of position, must be played somewhat differently.

It occurs when the red ball lies somewhere between the middle spot and the pyramid spot, in a position where, if the white were spotted and played a true half-ball stroke, the red would disappear in the opposite top pocket. Of course if the white were in convenient position for a cannon afterwards, this six stroke would not matter ; but suppose that instead of the red ball the opponent's ball were the object-ball, it would naturally be the proper game to keep it out of the pocket ; or, suppose the white ball not in position for a cannon afterwards, it would be equally desirable to keep the red ball out of the pocket, in order to accomplish a series of losing hazards. This stroke must be played as in diagram 6.

Instead of spotting for a true half-ball, spot

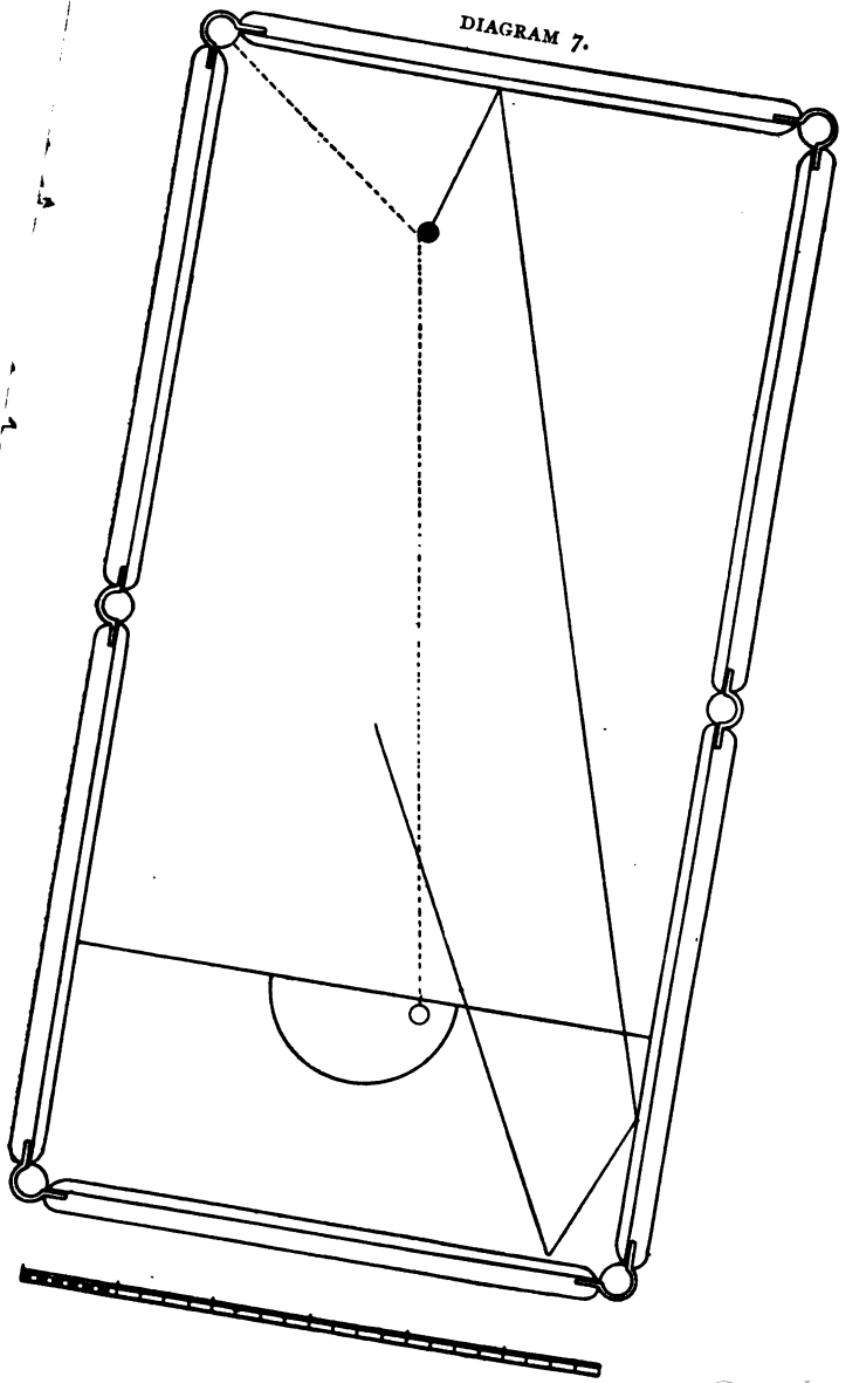
DIAGRAM 6.



your ball so as to make the angle formed by the pocket, the red ball, and your own somewhat more obtuse than a natural-angle stroke. For instance, in diagram 6 the striker's ball is spotted a little to the *right* of where it should be spotted for a half-ball stroke. Play rather thicker than a half-ball stroke on the red, and put on a little reverse or check-side. Your eye must show you how to divide the red ball. The red ball then being struck fuller than a half-ball, will not be sent into the top pocket, but, striking the top and side cushions (as shown in the diagram), will take a direction to the centre line of the table below the middle pockets.

There is another losing hazard into the top pockets which, as many players are apt to play it wrongly, may with advantage be explained. This occurs when the red ball is at or near the spot shown in diagram 7, or

DIAGRAM 7.



of course in a corresponding position on the right-hand side of the table. Now most players will spot their ball on the right-hand spot in baulk for an ordinary half-ball stroke. Played in this way, the red ball will be left either in baulk, or so near to it or the right-hand bottom cushion, as to be practically safe. The striker's object, as I have said before, must be to bring the object-ball well out in the direction of the centre line of the table. The way to accomplish this in this case is to spot the white ball an inch or so to the left of the corner spot, so as to make the angle a little wider one than an ordinary half-ball stroke, necessitating in fact almost a forcing stroke. The red ball will then take the course shown in the diagram, and come well up in the middle of the table.

Losers in the
middle
pockets.

Losing hazards into the middle pockets are perhaps somewhat simpler and easier

than those into the top pockets, the general idea in making them still being to bring the object-ball as nearly as possible to the centre line of the table. As for the distance the object-ball should travel in these hazards, the ball, after hitting the top cushion, should return about half-way between the middle spot and the centre spot in baulk.

Of the simpler strokes in this connection no diagrams are necessary, but there are one or two positions where the half-ball stroke must be varied for the sake of position, which call for some explanation.

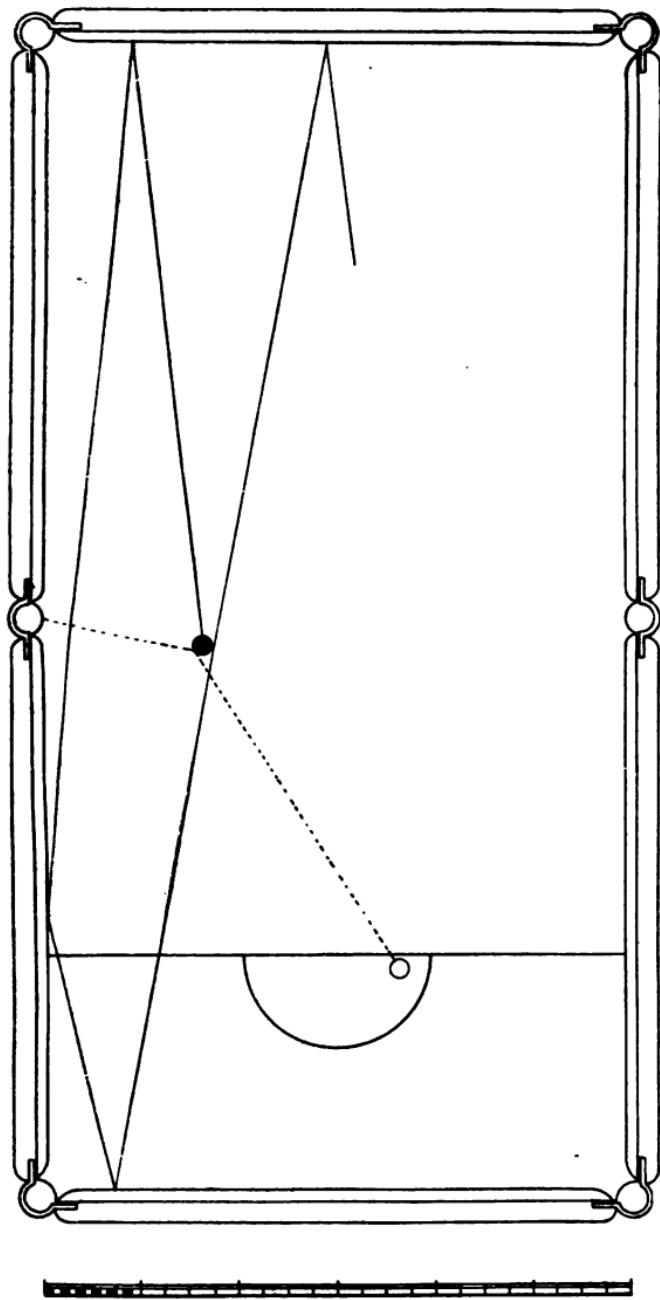
In diagram 8, the red ball occupies a position with regard to the middle pocket very similar to that which it occupies in diagram 7 with regard to the top pocket ; and ninety-nine players out of a hundred would spot their ball on the right-hand spot in baulk, and play an ordinary free half-ball

stroke into the pocket. By doing so, however, the red ball, if not, on account of the strength employed, brought into and left in baulk, must return close to the side cushions, and the chances are greatly in favour of its being left safe.

The proper way to play this stroke is to spot your ball some three or four inches to the left of the corner spot, and to play a very hard forcing hazard into the pocket. The red ball will then take the course shown in the diagram, or something like it. We may mention here, that in a very hard forcing hazard the red ball should be struck slightly fuller than a half-ball, but it is most important in these forcing strokes, that the player should let all the force put into the stroke come from the arm and shoulder, and not from the body, which must be immovable.

Forcing
strokes.

DIAGRAM 8.

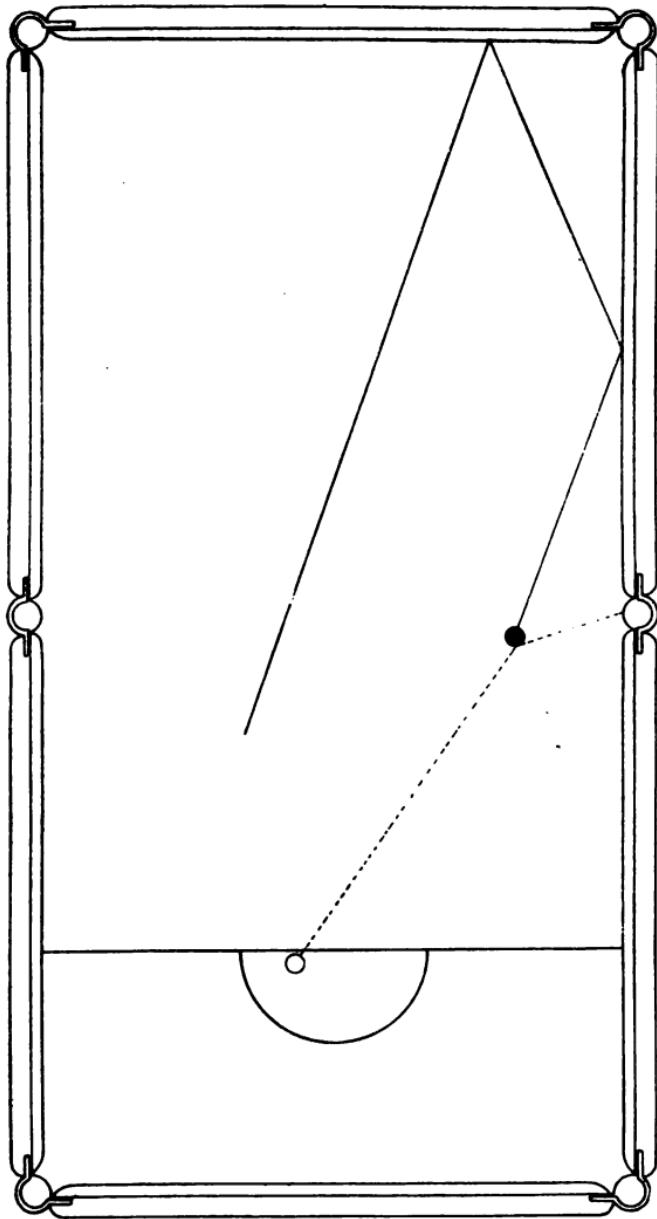


Again, take the case of the ball over the middle pocket in diagram 9. If this stroke is played a simple half-ball stroke, the red ball's course will lie almost straight into the right top pocket. It may go into that pocket, or it may catch in the angles of the pocket, and so be left safe under the top or side cushion; but in any case position will be lost.

Bearing in mind that the ball must be kept away from the cushions, the way to play this stroke is to spot your ball further to the left in baulk, so as to make the stroke a run-through stroke. The red being struck fuller than a half-ball (what some people call a three-quarter ball, as shown in the cut on page 19), will strike the side and top cushions, as shown in the diagram, and will come down well into the middle of the table.

The player will soon discover for himself

DIAGRAM 9.



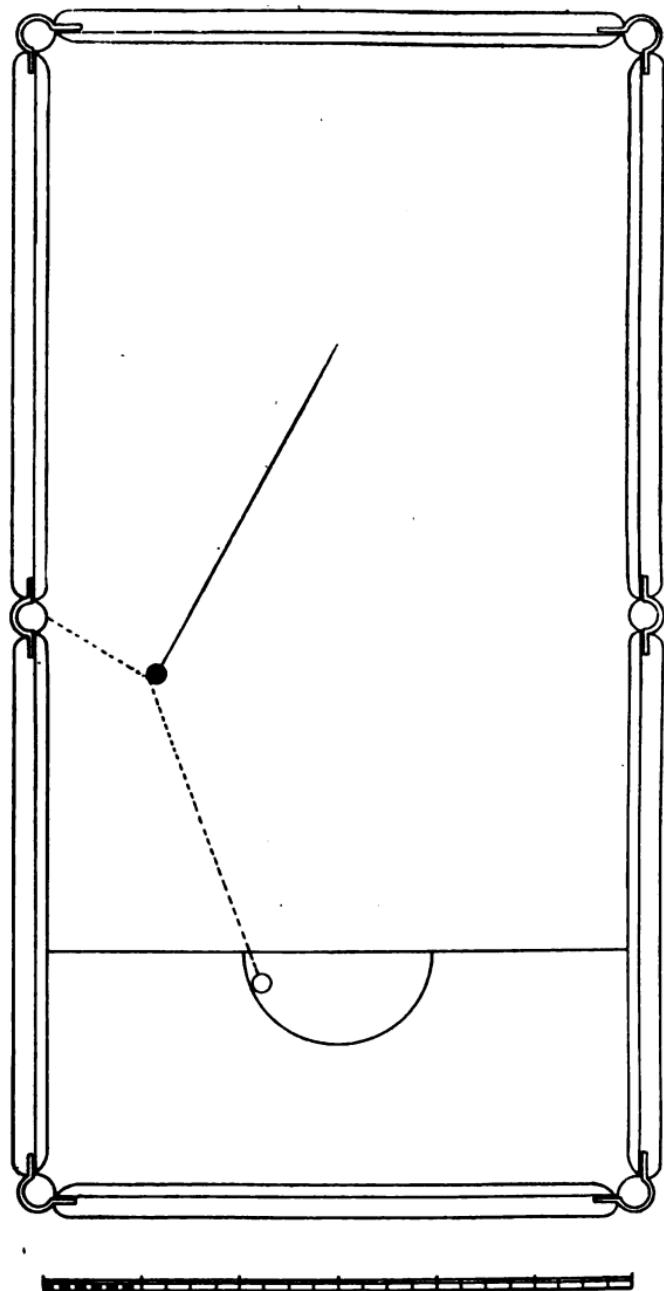
other positions where he must vary the stroke for the sake of position, sometimes making the stroke a forcing hazard or even a screw stroke.

In some positions, where the angle is not wide enough to admit of a half-ball stroke, he will naturally have to play a fine stroke, as in diagram 10. His aim then will still be to leave the red ball in the middle of the table. He will therefore play slowly on the red and cut it to something like the position shown in the diagram.

Ninety-nine
red hazards.

The wonderful break made by John Roberts on the 13th of February, 1894, which consisted almost entirely of losing hazards, may serve to show how exceedingly useful these red losers are. He was playing against Tom Taylor, and he began the break by fluking his opponent's ball down whilst playing for a cannon. He then began to play at the red,

DIAGRAM IO.



first putting it down, and then making no fewer than 98 consecutive losing hazards from it in the top and middle pockets in a break of 299—a truly marvellous piece of play. He had previously made 234 (78 hazards) in the same way off the red ball at Manchester in May, 1892, whilst Peall had previously held the record with 222 (74 red hazards), made in a break of 320 against the Champion, on January 27, 1886.

Losers the
backbone
of Billiards.

Red losers have been termed, very appropriately, the “backbone” of the game, and a player who has mastered them sufficiently to be able to make five or six with a tolerable certainty of getting position, need not fear an antagonist of the showy order. Once more, we may repeat, bring the object-ball as near as possible to the centre line of the table, but at all events keep it away from the side cushions.

CHAPTER V.

SIDE, SCREW, DRAG, ETC.

THERE are, perhaps, few greater stumbling Side. blocks in the way of average amateurs than are presented by "side." In none of the strokes hitherto described is its use, as a rule, at all necessary, and we would impress strongly on the reader the advisability of never using side except when *absolutely necessary* for the accomplishment of the stroke or for the sake of position after it.

To put on side, the ball must be struck How applied. on the side instead of in the middle. Of course, side can be applied to any part of the ball, high or low, but as a rule, about the middle of the ball is the proper place. The

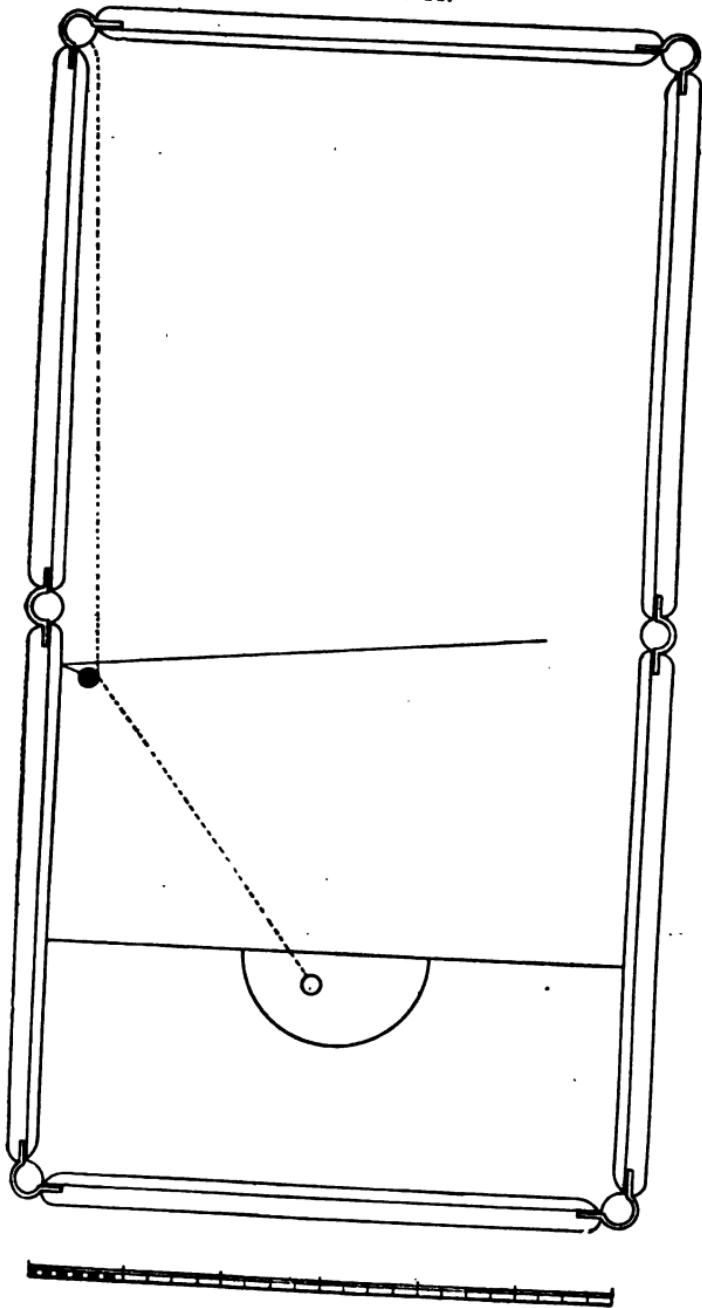
great mistake made by beginners is to fancy that the more the ball is struck on the side, the greater will be the amount of side put on. To a certain extent, of course, this is true, but, as in every other stroke on the table, much more depends on the *way* in which the ball is struck.

In putting on side, the ball should be struck with what one may call a smart little flip. The cue must be held parallel to the line of aim, and not transversely across the ball.

Theory of
aiming with
side.

An explanation of the theory of aiming when side is put on, may possibly be a help to some readers. In diagram 11, the proper game is what is known as a "long jenny" into the top pocket. To accomplish the stroke, as much left-hand side, *i.e.* cushion-side, as possible is required to drag the ball into the pocket, the stroke being a natural-angle stroke.

DIAGRAM II.



Supposing that this stroke were to be played a half-ball stroke, without side, of course the cue would point exactly at the right edge of the red ball. For the purposes of the stroke, however, the striker's ball has to be struck, say, three-eighths of an inch on the *left* of the centre. If aim were taken, with this amount of side on, at the edge of the red, the white ball would be propelled exactly three-eighths of an inch *outside* the right edge of the red, which would be struck much too fine.

To counteract this, in putting on side, the striker must aim at a point on the red as much on the left-hand side of, or *inside*, the edge of the red, as the spot, which he is striking, is on the left-hand side of the centre of his own ball. This is the principle which readers can apply for themselves. The eye will soon learn to do this instinctively.

In addition to the use of side in enlarging a pocket, as in the jenny just shown, it has also, though only to a limited extent, the power of enlarging and diminishing angles after a ball has been struck. For instance, in diagram 12, the losing hazard in the middle pocket, if played an ordinary half-ball stroke, has to be played so hard that the red comes into baulk. By playing more slowly from the same place with strong right-hand side, the pocket can still be made, and the red ball will only travel as far as is shown in the diagram.

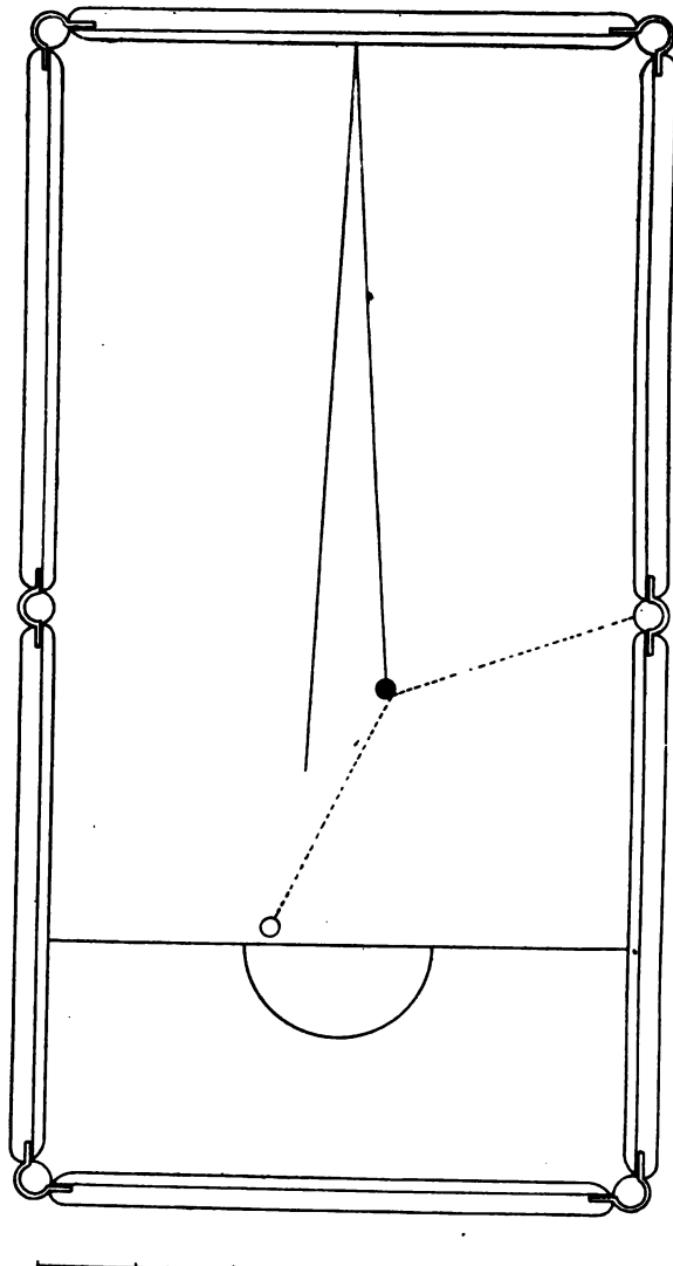
As I have said, however, this power of enlarging and diminishing angles, as shown above, is only a limited one, the cue-ball only coming off the object-ball at a very slightly increased or diminished angle, according to which side, reverse or running, has been used.

The great use of side is to enlarge or diminish the angle or angles *after* the cue-ball has struck a cushion, or a ball and cushion.

The side, in fact, has little visible effect until the cushion is reached. For instance, in diagram 13 the white ball, played with a great deal of side, after hitting the red, hits the top cushion in almost exactly the same spot as it would do if no side at all were employed; but it is *after* hitting the top cushion that the effect of the side is seen, the white shooting off at a very obtuse angle towards the spot-white.

It will be useful to remember that, the slower the strength employed, the more the side will tell. Particularly is this the case when reverse or check side is used. The reason for this is that the indiarubber of the cushions is less indented when slow strength is employed, and the side in consequence

DIAGRAM 12.



remains on the ball. When, however, side is used with great strength, the ball sinks deeper into the cushion, and, during the instant it is embedded in it, the side is more or less taken off the ball.

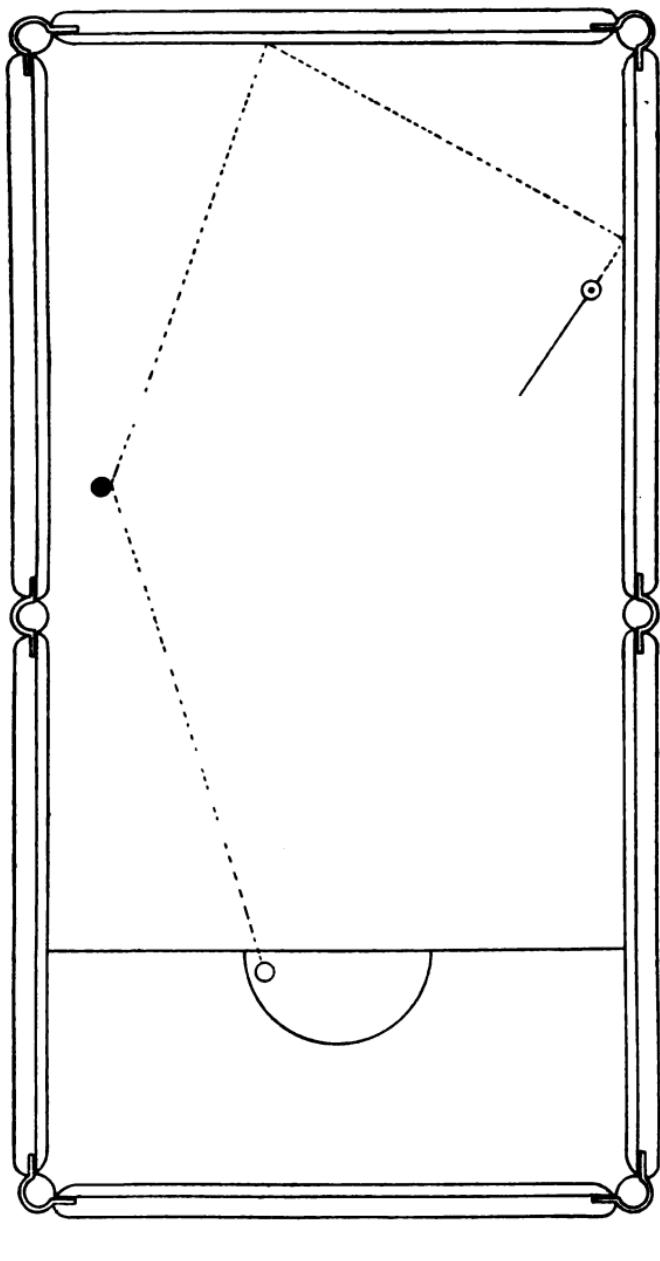
Some remarks will be found further on about the effect of hard and soft strokes when played off the cushions.

Side can be combined with screw with very great advantage, especially in making certain losing hazards, but diagrams of these strokes are hardly necessary in a work like this. Nor is it worth while to give diagrams showing what side should be used in different strokes. The player will do better to find out these matters for himself.

Hold the cue
loosely.

In putting on side, be sure to hold the cue loosely and parallel to the line of aim that would be taken, supposing the cue-ball were struck in the centre.

DIAGRAM 13.



Screw.

Of "screw" it will not be necessary to say much.

Hold cue
firmly.

In making all screw shots the cue should be grasped rather tighter than in making ordinary strokes, but in no case must there be a draw-back motion of the cue in the act of striking. Many writers on Billiards have insisted on this draw-back motion of the cue in the case of screw-back strokes, but the advice is altogether erroneous. In making a screw-back, the ball must be delivered just as in ordinary strokes, as if the cue were intended to follow on. At the same time, of course, when the ball begins to recoil, the cue must be lifted out of the way of it.

Let cue
follow on.

As a rule, in making screw strokes, the stroke employed is a three-quarter ball or thereabouts. The cut on page 19 will show the three-quarter ball stroke, but like every other stroke it is entirely a matter of eye.

The great difficulty about screw strokes is the fact that not only has the striker to consider at what point of the object-ball he is going to aim, but that he has to judge very precisely where he must hit his own ball. It is a matter of fact that, in some instances of screw strokes, he must depart from the rule before laid down, and at the moment of striking, being certain of his aim, he must look at his own ball and see that he is striking it in the place that his judgment tells him that he ought to.

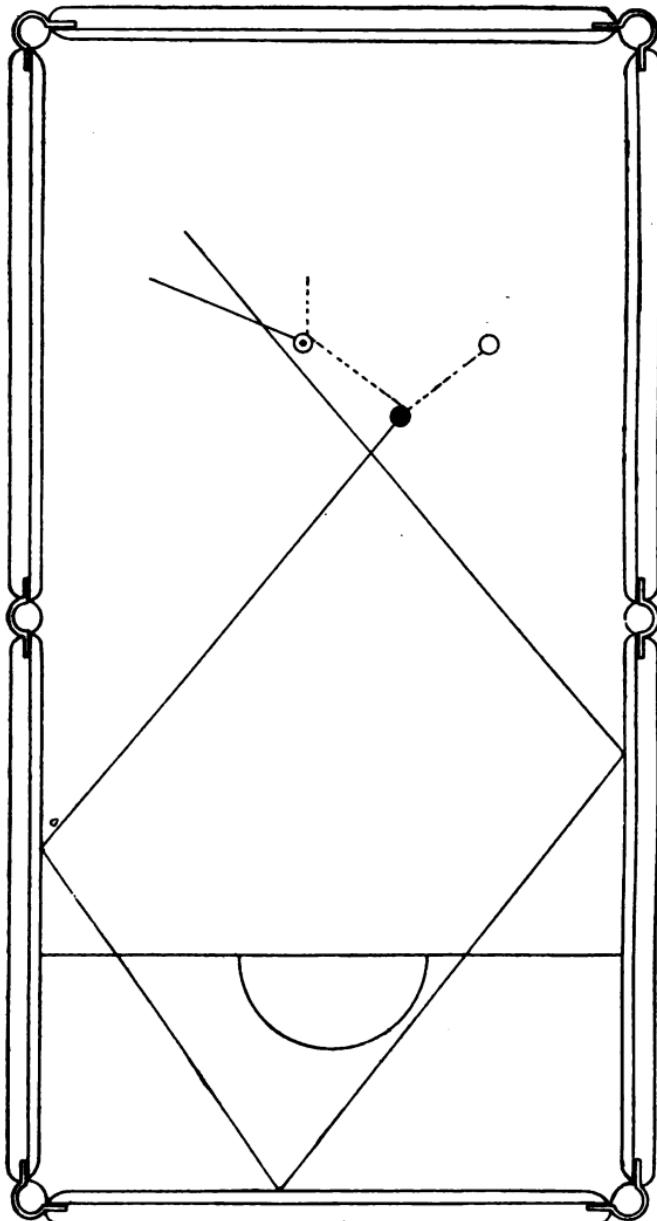
There is a kind of screw which is exceedingly useful, and but seldom employed by amateurs. This is called "stab" or "stick" screw. Its use is in making the cue-ball, although struck hard, travel very slowly after impact with the object-ball. It is simply a modification of the "stick" stroke employed in Pyramids and Pool, where the cue-ball

stops dead on impact with the object-ball. This is especially useful in playing the spot stroke, in the description of which stroke it will be again referred to.

Diagram 14 will show its use. The cannon from the red to the white *can* be made by a forcing hazard, but then the position of the balls will be extremely uncertain. By hitting the white below the centre, with stab-screw, the red can be made to travel, as shown in the diagram, and the two balls left close together, or approximately so.

In making stab-screws, the ball must be hit hard below the centre (higher or lower according to the proximity or otherwise of the object-ball), and the object-ball must be struck a *old cue very* three-quarter ball or fuller. The bridge must *tight.* be as firm as possible, and the cue must be held even tighter than in other screw shots,— Joseph Bennett says, “*as tight as possible,*”

DIAGRAM 14.



—and pressed down firmly on the bridge. Players must strive to find out for themselves positions in which this stroke will be useful.

Drag.

Putting on “drag” is another method of striking the ball which is of very great use. Drag not only makes a ball run very true, but it has the effect of retaining side in the cue-ball for a very long distance. Its use in thus retaining side is chiefly shown in making long run-through losers in the top pockets, where the object-ball is over one of them, and where it is desired to bring it into the middle of the table, as a little reverse side materially assists these strokes.

The cue-ball is struck low down just as if for a screw stroke, the only difference being that the cue is held loosely, as for ordinary strokes. The cue is dug well into the ball with the following-on motion before explained, the ball starts off at a rapid pace,

but the drag, which is the effect of the ball's being hit below its centre, causes it to rotate *towards* the player, and this rotation is all the while checking the velocity of the ball. It is exactly the same as when a locomotive is suddenly reversed—the wheels are indeed revolving backwards, but their forward motion is only gradually checked.

Strength, though one of the most important features in the whole game, the mastery of which must be sought by every player, can hardly be learnt from books. The player must acquire a knowledge of this himself.

Some strokes there are that must be played at a certain strength—for instance, a forcing hazard. Screw strokes may sometimes be played at various strengths with an idea to position. The true half-ball stroke, as already shown, may be varied to a certain degree,

but fine strokes may be played at any strength.

Fine strokes.

In playing a fine stroke, as a rule the cue-ball should be hit in the exact centre, no side being put on. Where, however, one is close to the object-ball, side can, if necessary, be put on.

Run-through strokes.

A word or two on run-through strokes may be useful. In playing a run-through cannon, a little, just a little, reverse side may sometimes be employed with advantage, but for beginners it is better that *no side whatever* should be used.

In making these run-through strokes, beginners should be sure to strike the ball as high as possible. A really good player, however, can strike his ball almost anywhere—in fact quite low down—and yet run through a ball. It almost entirely depends on the *way* that the ball is struck. The idea

in the mind, after the eye has properly divided the balls and the cue is pointed in the right direction, should be to give the cue-ball a direction almost similar to that taken by the object-ball, and to keep it from flying off at a wide angle. More than ever must the cue follow the ball.

Following cannons are, as a rule, missed by the striker's ball going *outside* the third ball, and very rarely indeed by its going *inside*. The stroke should therefore be played as if the striker intended to cannon on the *inside* edge of the third ball. There must be a free and flowing motion about the stroke, but this it is impossible to describe on paper.

Following cannons.

As a general rule, long run-through strokes and fine strokes should be avoided, as even the best professionals are not certain of making them when the distance is great.

CHAPTER VI.

CANNONS.

Fancy strokes. TOO many players, who have not studied the game or formed any sound theories in connection with it, are led away into playing what are known amongst "players" as "fancy strokes." Prominent among these strokes are all-round cannons; in fact, difficult cannons of all descriptions. The young player who perhaps possesses some execution, is very apt to get into the habit of showing off, and attempting cannons that it is almost ten to one against him making, and which, even if made, are of little or no use in advancing his game.

Some very young and verdant players

(though there are others, too, who cannot claim the excuse of youth), apart from trying these cannons, frequently, when they have made some astounding cannon in a most "accidental" manner, inform the spectators in tones of indignation, that they "played for it." Now nothing can be so foolish as this, and beginners will do well to remember that it is not the slightest use to try to impose on a good player by telling him what you played for. A good player sees and knows instinctively what you did play for, even if you played for no definite stroke at all, but merely hit the balls hard, taking the chances of fluking.

Resuming with our cannons, however, the one thing a learner has to do is to avoid a showy, flash style of play. If he sees a stroke that is obviously beyond his powers, and that he really knows to be beyond his powers, he

Avoid showy
play.

should not play for it, but play for safety, by either giving a miss or playing on either the red or white, leaving the object-ball, if possible, under a cushion, and his own ball as far as possible from the red and from any pocket.

Of course, when one has confidence in one's own powers, and is playing well, there are times when one can go out for an all-round cannon or other difficult stroke, in order to "open the game," especially when one is behind ; but learners would find their game very much strengthened if, instead of making the game one of knocking the balls about and trying to make difficult individual strokes, they would regard it as a game to be won by a series of comparatively *easy* strokes, all made with very great care as to position. They will be surprised at their improvement if they will give up their usual haphazard

style of play, leaving alone next-to-impossible cannons, and will play for some simple and definite result. Their game will soon get, as it were, formulated into a system.

As this book is only intended for novices, who should get into the habit of playing as simple a game as possible, very few diagrams of cannons will be given, and those few will be given merely for the sake of showing position play. Even the simplest cannons on the board are sometimes pitfalls for young players, their very easiness, making them so. Thus, a cannon is often so simple, so very easy, that they at once put down their hand and strike, without ever giving the ultimate position of the balls a thought.

Take pains
with easy
strokes.

The difficulty as regards position-play in connection with cannons is this:—There are three balls on the table, and each of them, if the cannon is to be made, must be disturbed;

therefore no player, not even the great John Roberts himself, can foretell after any ordinary cannon the *exact* (I mean of course the mathematically exact) position of all three balls. In nursery cannon play, to which allusion will be made hereafter, of course the position of all three balls can be foretold exactly enough for all practical purposes.

In the case of a losing hazard, as has already been pointed out, the sole thing we have to think about is the position of the object-ball, the striker's ball, in the case of a successful stroke, being of course in hand. In winning hazards, too, the position of one ball has merely to be determined. That of course is the striker's ball, for the red, if it is put in the pocket, has obviously to be spotted. If the opponent's ball is put in, it of course remains in hand.

Whenever a simple cannon is "on," our

first thought must be about position. Now, in order to effect position after a cannon, we must do one of three things.

In the first place, we can bring the red ball and our opponent's ball together after the stroke, leaving as far as possible our own ball so placed that we can make this next cannon with position.

Secondly, we can accomplish the stroke, and leave one or both of the object-balls over a pocket.

Thirdly, we can leave the red ball over the pocket, and our opponent's ball close to the spot. This latter alternative is not taken so much advantage of by amateurs as it might be.

In the second case, where the object of the stroke is to leave one or both balls over the pocket, the striker's attention should chiefly be directed to the position of the red ball,

Study the red ball's position.

and for the following reasons. A hazard, whether winning or losing, made from the red ball, not only counts three points, but, which is of more importance, the red ball, in the case of a winning hazard, is replaced on the table. As a rule, therefore, when the striker does not see his way to bringing the two balls together, he should devote his attention to driving the red ball over a pocket, and especially over a top pocket.

In fact, too much stress can hardly be laid on the importance in high-class Billiards of perpetually striving to leave the red ball over one of the top pockets. If any of my readers are spot-stroke players, they will recognize the great importance of this. Whenever, therefore, you see an opportunity of leaving the red over one of the top pockets, never neglect it.

Now when the cannon is a very easy one,

and the red ball has to be struck first, the striker may often vary his stroke in order to drive it over a pocket, cutting it fine or hitting it full. When, however, the red is the second ball to be struck in playing a cannon, far greater skill is necessary in order to send it in the desired direction. Perhaps nothing is much more wonderful in John Roberts's game, than the extraordinary accuracy with which he "gets on to" the second ball in exactly the right point, as well as with the exact amount of strength.

Such, then, are the general principles to be held in mind when playing cannons in a break.

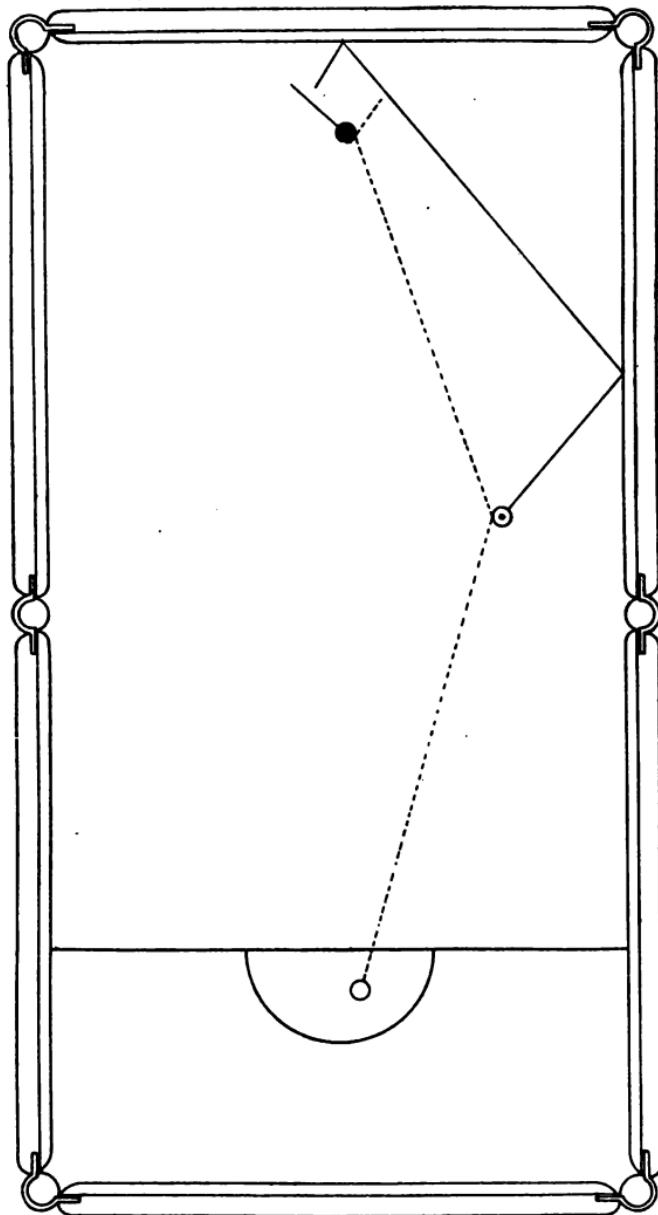
The following diagram shows an easy but an exceedingly useful cannon, that is, if it is properly played. It is not too much to say that this cannon occurs, and is played in high-class professional Billiards, ten times as often

A very useful cannon.

as any other cannon on the board. We are not speaking, of course, of close or nursery cannons. The position for making this stroke is, in fact, continually sought after and played for by professionals. It is beyond measure a useful one, because it not only "gathers" the balls, but brings them together at the top of the table—a position more useful than any other. This stroke, played properly, places the balls in a commanding position, not only for spot-stroke play, but also for "the top-of-the-table game," which will presently be described.

In diagram 15, the striker having to play from baulk, of course the cannon from the spot-white ball to the red is a very easy one. The player, spotting his ball in baulk for a true half-ball stroke, has only to play to cannon gently on to the red ball—preferably on to the *inside* of the red ball—and the

DIAGRAM 15.



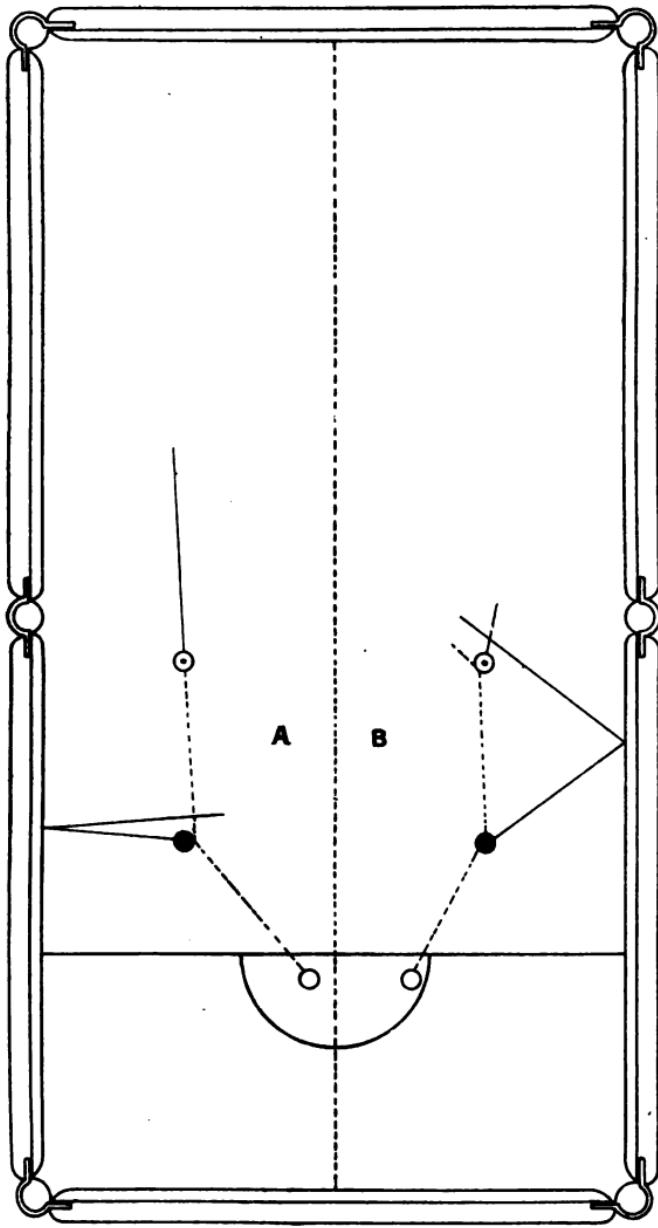
three balls will come together at the top of the table, as shown in the diagram, and probably a certain score will be left.

Here is, perhaps, one of the best instances that could be cited of the necessity of playing with proper judgment as to strength. Anyone can make the cannon, but if it is played too hard the balls will all be separated after the stroke, their position being left entirely to chance. You may see professionals play this stroke twenty or thirty times in an evening, and never once fail to obtain perfect position.

Vary stroke
for position.

Very often, when a simple cannon is left and the player's ball is in hand, it is possible to vary the stroke for the sake of position—that is, to play some other stroke than a half-ball. In diagram 16, the striker has to play from hand, and the cannon is, of course, very easy. It is, however, *almost*

DIAGRAM 16.

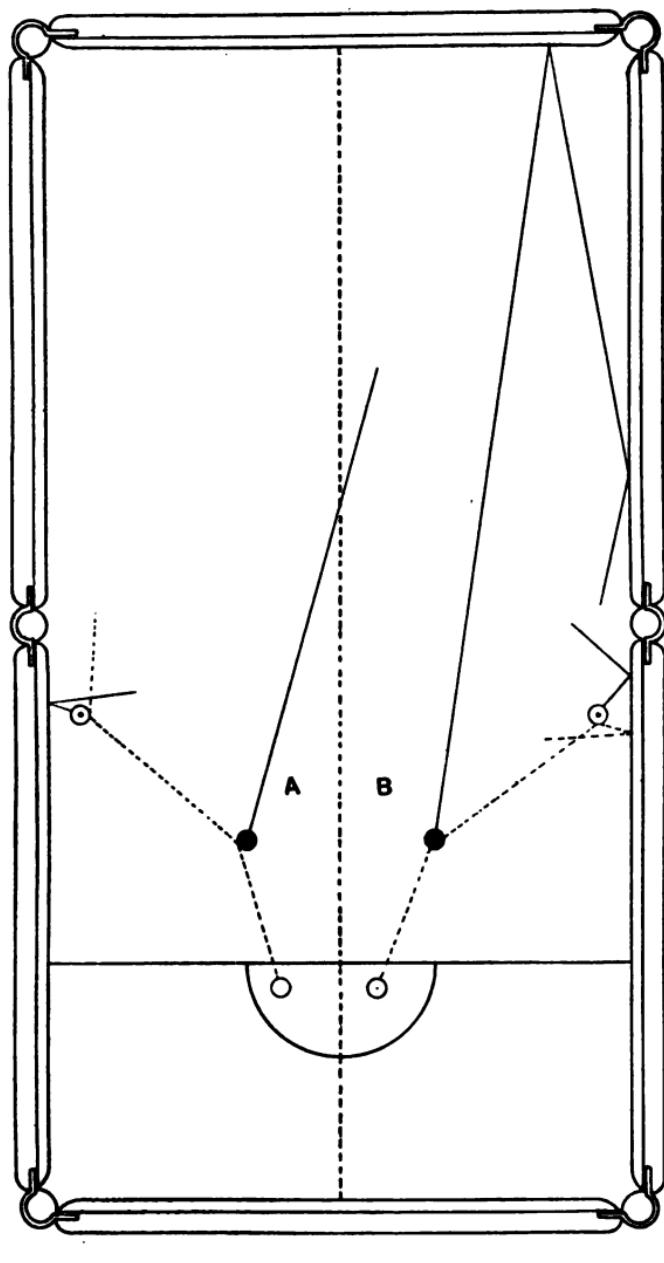


invariably played quite wrongly by amateurs. They spot their ball for a half-ball stroke, in which case the balls are separated, the red being left near baulk and the white driven up the table, as in stroke marked *A* on the left-hand side of the table in the diagram. Perhaps they may leave a hazard by accident off the third ball, but it is not "the game" to play it this way.

The striker should spot his ball so as to make the stroke a run-through, as shown in the stroke marked *B* in diagram 16, on the other side of the table. The red is then driven *up* the table, and will come off the cushion and meet the spot-white, as in the diagram.

The principle employed in making this stroke must be borne in mind and carried out in many other positions on the table. We will give one more example of it, to which

DIAGRAM 17.



much the same remarks as those made about the stroke in diagram 16 will apply. The strokes shown in diagram 17 will speak quite plainly for themselves. In this diagram, as in the last, *A* (played a half-ball stroke) is the wrong way, and *B* (played a run-through stroke) is the right way of playing the shot.

A stab-screw
cannon.

It has already been shown how, by the means of stab-screw, a cannon can be effected quite slowly on to the third ball, the object-ball being driven back off a cushion or cushions, or even right round the table, as in diagram 14 on page 73.

Many other positions might be shown, but this being only an elementary work, the foregoing examples may prove sufficient to induce the reader to use his own observation and judgment as to where cannons may be played and position at the same time obtained.

Perhaps it may be as well to mention here those extremely useful and pretty strokes known as nursery cannons. These cannot be played without practice. When a player, therefore, has some opportunity to practise, instead of merely knocking the balls about, he should practise some "set" strokes, especially those that he feels he is deficient in, and nursery cannon practice will be of a great deal of use to him.

He should place the object-balls close together under the top cushion, and his own ball an inch or two away. He should then endeavour to cannon, keeping the two object-balls as close together as possible, hitting them with equal strength and keeping always *outside* them.

No written instructions on the making of nursery cannons can approach in usefulness the sight of a first-rate player making them,

Nursery
cannons.

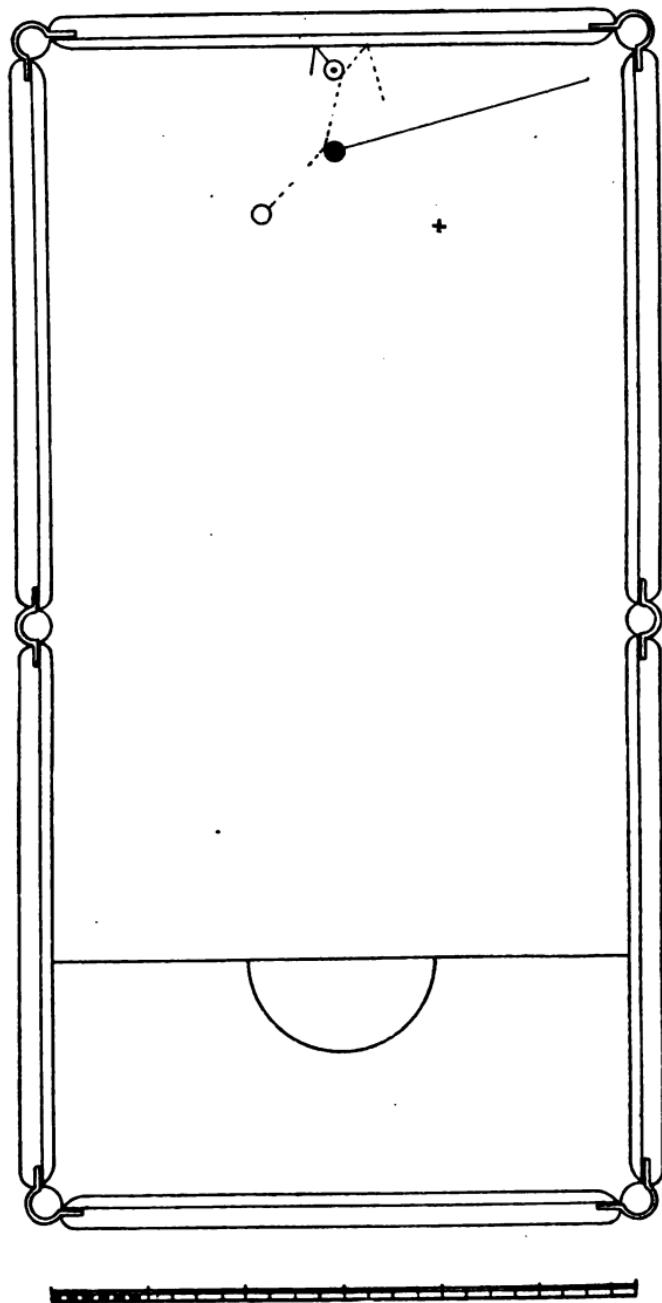
and the novice cannot do better than go and see John Roberts. His nursery cannons are so wonderfully fine that frequently the "click" of the balls is quite inaudible and it seems as though, instead of his ball hitting the other two, a shadow were merely passing over them.

The top-of-the-table game.

The so-called "tea-tray game," or modern "top-of-the-table" play, calls for a few words. This again may be practised with great advantage by the aspirant for Billiard honours. It consists of a series of nursery cannons, varied by an occasional red winning hazard, made at the top of the table on a surface occupying certainly no more than one-sixth of the area of the table.

Beginning, say, with the balls in the position shown in diagram 18, the striker's object should be to make the cannon, at the same time leaving the red ball over the right top

DIAGRAM 18.



pocket, and to avoid moving the white more than an inch or two. He must also avoid leaving the spot-white ball between his own and the red ball. The red being left over the pocket, his object then is to cut it in and come off the cushion to about the black cross in the diagram, so as to leave another cannon, which should have the same result as the last. This game he should play as long as he can, always making runs of nurseries when practicable. Whenever he is in danger of breaking up a nursery, he should strive to leave at least one of the object-balls, particularly the red ball, over one of the top pockets.

To a really first-class player, this game is almost as good as the spot stroke, the greatest exponent of it being, of course, John Roberts. He has frequently made breaks of 300 or more without having to play from baulk more than three or four times. The sight of his play at

this particular branch of the game would, as in nursery cannon play, teach the learner far more than can be shown on paper. This "top-of-the-table game," as it is termed, has completely revolutionized the old game, which used to consist mostly of red losing hazards. We are alluding now, of course, to the spot-barred game. It is suspected that the Champion, did he not wish to please his patrons by avoiding monotony of any kind in his displays, could use this style of play to much greater advantage than he does even now.

In connection with cannons, where one, two, Angles. or more cushions have to be struck after the object-ball, it should be noted that, though the angle of reflection from the cushions of a billiard-table is not always mathematically equal to that of incidence, it is so nearly enough for all practical purposes. Also, as we have before pointed out in treating of side, a Effects of strength.

ball, if struck hard, will come off the cushion much more sharply (*i.e.* at a less angle) than one struck gently, the harder struck ball, of course, sinking deeper into the india-rubber of the cushions.

In making these cushion cannons, the striker should avoid looking from ball to ball and from cushion to cushion. He should have the whole table, as it were, in his eye. It is very good practice indeed to play round the table with one ball at all sorts of angles, with and without side. Nothing but actual practice can teach you how to use the angles of the table practically.

As a general rule, only play for a cannon when there is no easy losing hazard on ; make losing hazards with position the strength of your all-round game, and try always to play a sound, simple, and straightforward game.

CHAPTER VII.

MISCELLANEOUS STROKES.

THERE are a few strokes that amateurs, as a rule, fail in, or do not sufficiently understand, but which may be made clear by the use of diagrams.

In diagram 19, the balls are nearly straight, the plain and the red balls being too close together to allow of a following stroke, and the “push stroke” is the game. The push stroke is one of the most useful strokes in the whole game, and should be acquired, if possible, by a practical lesson from some professional who would teach more than pages of written matter. This stroke is of great importance in nursery cannon play—in fact if it

The push stroke.

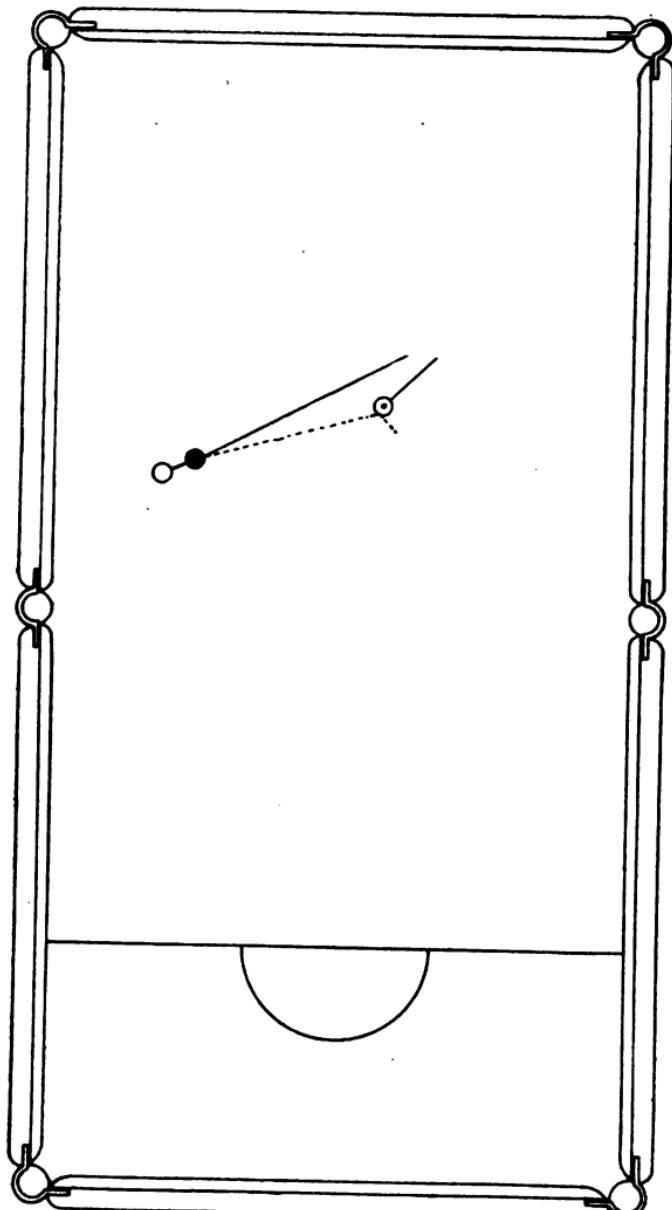
were abolished, as I trust it never will be in the English game, we should never see the magnificent runs of cannons made by our modern professionals—noticeably, Roberts, the *nonpareil*, and D. Richards.

For the push stroke, the cue must be shortened in the hand as for playing at a ball under the cushion, and the bridge must be made quite close to the ball. For this stroke, the cue is not to be drawn back. Having put the cue to your own ball well below the centre of it, raise the right arm and push *slowly* downwards on the ball, taking care that the cue does not slip from it. Be careful, too, that you do not strike your ball twice, in which case the stroke is foul.

Another push stroke.

There is another push stroke which terribly puzzles amateurs, who as a rule never attempt it. The white ball covers only a quarter of

DIAGRAM 19.

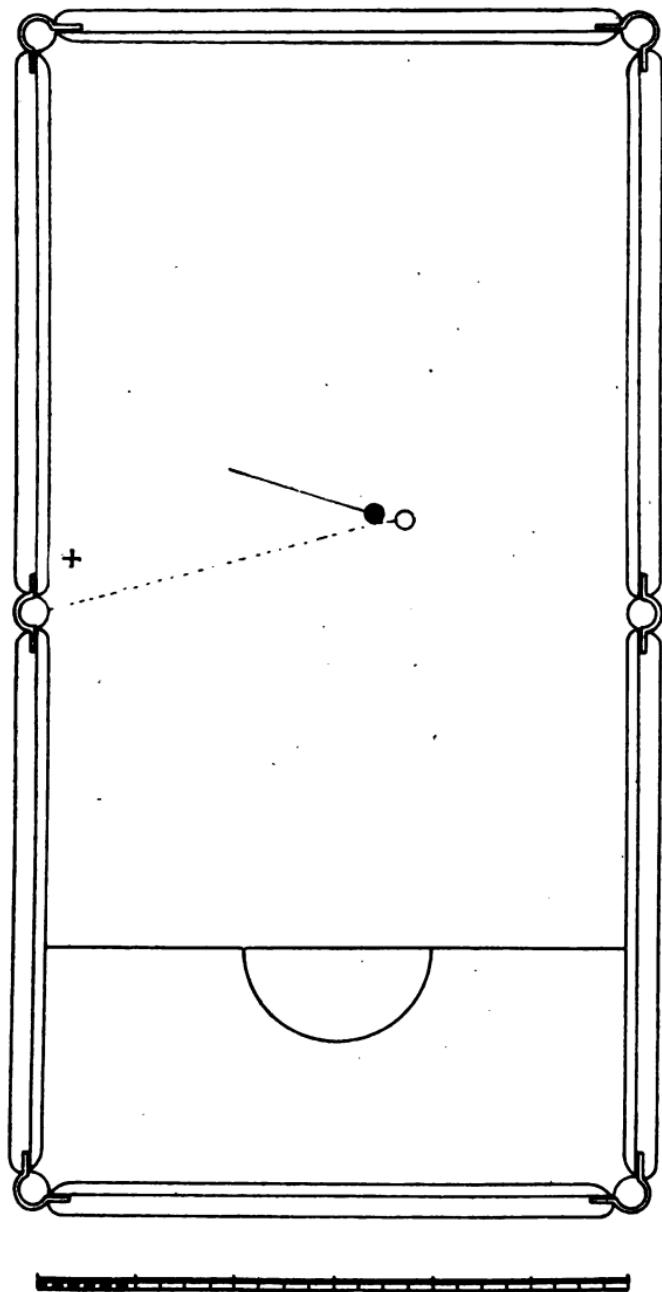


the red ball, as shown in diagram 20. The game is to push the plain ball gently through the red into the middle pocket. This stroke is quite as much a push stroke as the stroke last described, the white being pushed right through the red ball. Some allowance has to be made, however, and aim must be taken at the cross in the diagram. A few trials will soon give the student some idea.

The half-push stroke.

Next comes the half-push stroke. This is a stroke at which amateurs invariably break down, not understanding in the least how to play it. It is perhaps the only stroke on the table where measurement can be of any use, and though it can sometimes be made by the eye alone, it is, as a rule, safer to judge it by such measurement. For instance, in diagram 21, the game is to cannon on to the spot-white ball. The striker's ball is too close to the red for a run-through stroke, and

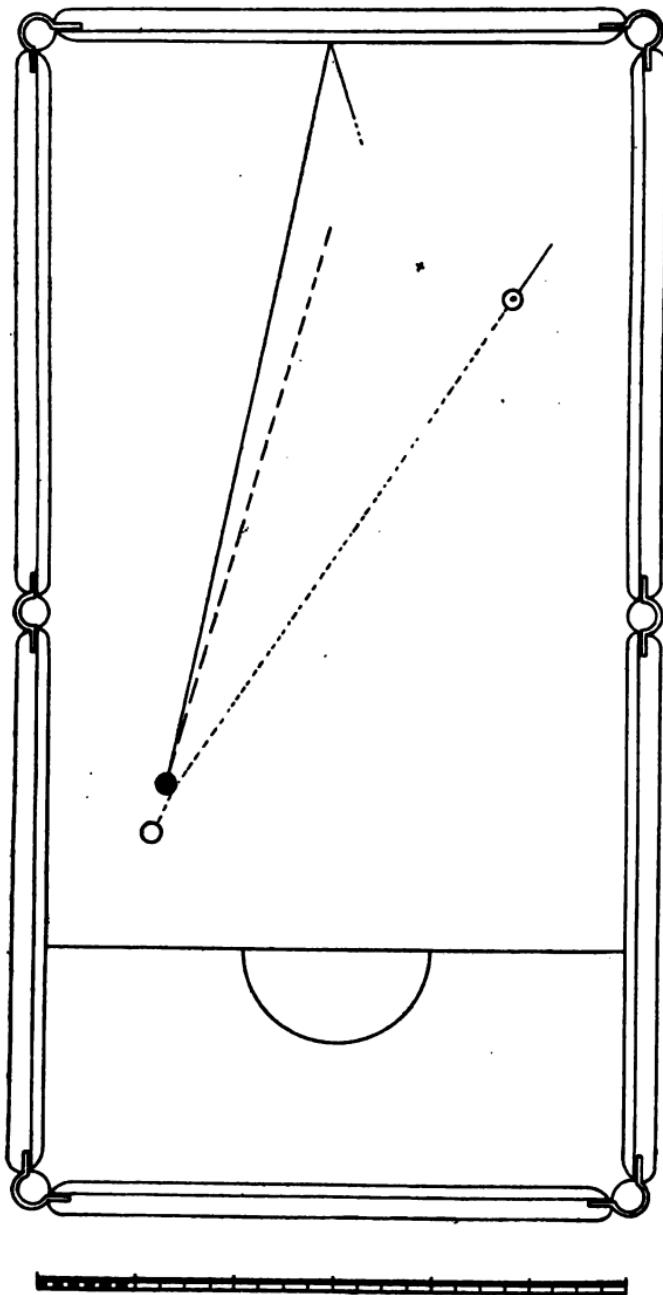
FIGURE 20.



the angle too wide to admit of a push stroke.

Through the centres of the plain and red balls draw an imaginary straight line (the *large* dotted line in the diagram), of the same length as the distance is from the spot-white, marking the spot where this imaginary line terminates, with a bit of chalk or the tip of the cue. Exactly half-way between this spot and the spot-white ball make another chalk mark (the cross in diagram 21). Make your bridge for this stroke in the ordinary way, but a little closer to your ball, and aim at the middle spot you have marked on the cloth, striking your ball *freely* in the centre. Take care to let the cue follow on. This stroke is termed the "half-push" stroke, because of the resemblance that this "following on" of the cue bears to the method employed in the push stroke.

DIAGRAM 21.

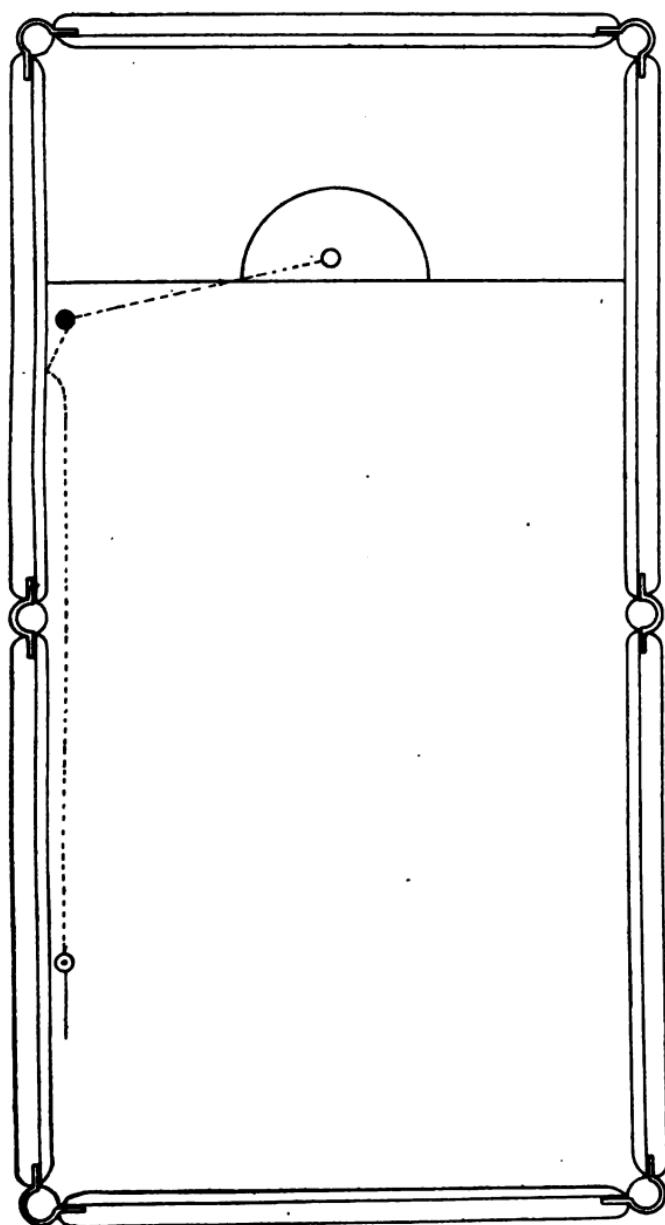


In a game, the direction through the centre of the striker's ball and the object-ball to the imaginary spot, is best taken by placing the cue over the two balls. The eye then can generally fix on some little chalk mark for the spot to be aimed at, half way between that point and the third ball.

The "jar" stroke.

The following is one more instance of a stroke that amateurs very seldom play. In diagram 22, the red ball will be seen a short distance off the cushions. Now it is possible, of course, to make the cannon on to the spot-white by screw, but the "jar" stroke is really the easiest and the most certain. Spot your ball nearly, but not quite, at right angles to the red (which must be struck rather fuller than a half-ball), and strike it high, hard, and freely. It will then, after hitting the cushion, be seen to curl round—keeping or hugging the cushion all the way up. Reverse—in this

DIAGRAM 22.



case, right-hand side—should be put on, as, in case you miss the cannon going up the table, you are nearly certain to make it coming down again.

Many other strokes not obvious to the beginner might be described, but hardly with advantage, as many of them require power of cue and execution which ordinary players do not possess. Besides, a knowledge of such strokes may be better picked up by witnessing a game between two professional players ; and indeed any marker or amateur who is a really good player will never refuse an explanation and practical demonstration of any stroke about which a novice, really anxious to learn, cares to question him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPOT-STROKE.

NO work on Billiards, however elementary, would be complete without some reference to, and description of, the spot-stroke. Although the palmy days of the spot-stroke have passed away probably for ever, and the spot-barred game is played to-day by professionals forty-nine times out of fifty, yet while the Billiard Association sanctions and upholds the All-in Championships (amateur and professional), the stroke cannot be said to be obsolete. The rooted public objection to it, on account of its monotony, is certainly well grounded, but only the extreme perfection to which its professional exponents have brought it, has

“scotched” if not killed it. It is only too evident that the English public, who pay to see professional Billiards, follow Lady Macbeth’s lead, and join her in saying, “Out, damned spot!” Ladies, this is only a quotation.

Its practice
very useful.

The practice of this stroke, however, is so exceedingly useful in itself, apart from the great strength that a knowledge of it imparts to one’s game, that very little excuse need be made for its introduction in this work. There is no stroke on the board, perhaps, that teaches one more about the real theories of the game—even of the all-round game—than the “spot.” The practice of it not only gives one a most delicate appreciation of strength, extreme accuracy of aim, and a good “touch” (a great point), but it inspires its votaries with confidence, and tends to induce, to a great extent, entire absence of nerve. It has even passed

into a proverb amongst Billiard-players, that the best spot-stroke player, as a rule, will become also the best all-round Billiard-player.

Of course, however, there are exceptions to this rule. To uphold, on the other hand, the truth of the above-mentioned *dictum*, we have the fact that that marvel at the spot-barred game, John Roberts, was also the best spot-stroke player in England, before he turned his attention to the restricted game. Since then, Peall and Mitchell have brought the stroke to an almost incredible perfection, and in an all-in game to-day, a break of 1,000 upwards would call forth no unusual amount of applause in a match, while the Press would certainly not enlarge on it.

Indeed, Mr. S. S. Christey (the Amateur All-in Champion) is credited with a break of 1,077 (containing 212 and 146 spots), made at

Big break by
an amateur.

Crouch End on August 8th, 1893. This hardly, however, ranks as an amateur record.

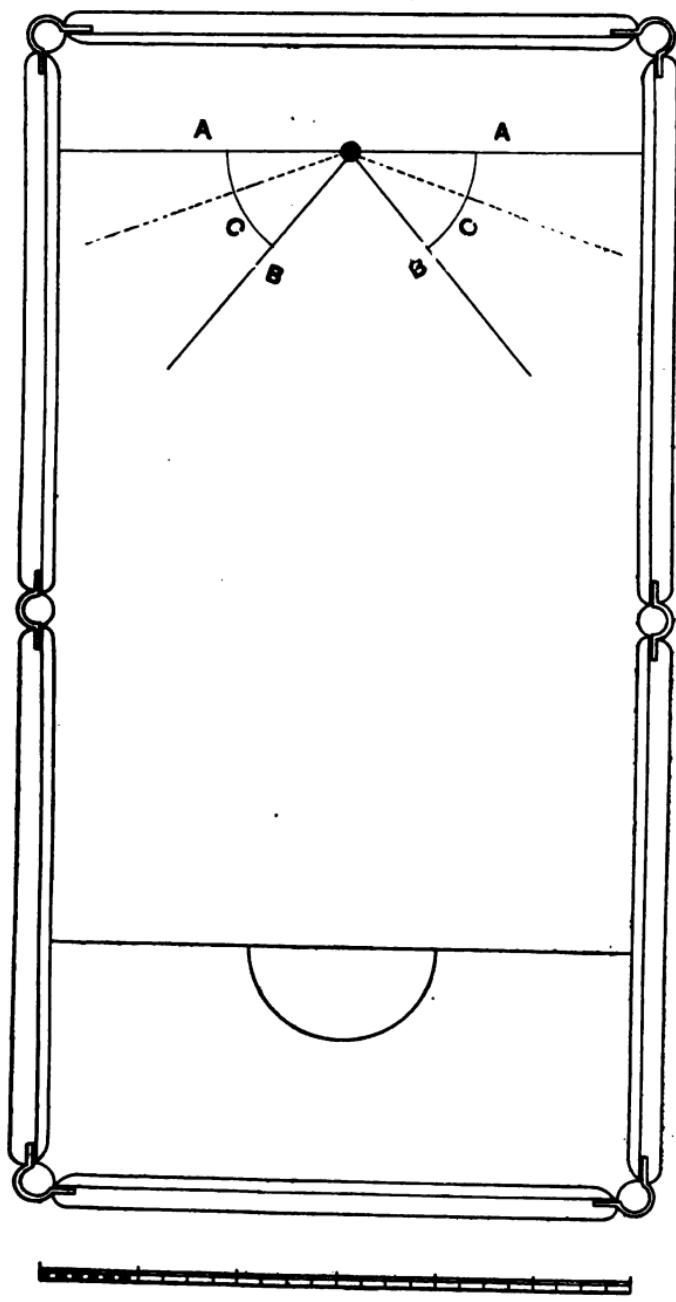
Asserting, therefore, again that there cannot possibly be better practice than the spot-stroke affords, we will proceed to explain with diagrams the various strokes it contains.

Limits of the spot-stroke.

Diagram 23 gives the limits in which the legitimate spot-stroke may be made. I am not saying that it cannot be made outside these limits, but I do say that the player's endeavour must be to keep his ball within these limits.

In this diagram the line *AA* is drawn through the spot parallel to the top cushion, and this is the extreme upper limit—except when the striker's ball has to be sent right round the table—that bounds spot practice. The lines *BB* bound the lower limit, and the portions of circles, drawn with a radius of

DIAGRAM 23.



I

15 inches from the *spot*, indicate the greatest distance that it is wise to get from the red.

Keep close to the red.

Remember that "the nearer the red, the better the play," and whatever stroke you may have left on, endeavour to leave yourself within a distance of from six inches to a foot from the red ball on the spot.

And as straight as possible.

Here, too—to save repetition in treating each separate "set" stroke—we may say once for all: strive, after every stroke, to leave your own ball on, or as near as possible to, the dotted lines *CC* in diagram 23, which are drawn in a dead straight line from the top pockets through the spot.

Position 1.—The Screw-back Stroke.

The striker's ball, as shown in diagram 24, *The Screw-back.* is on the dead straight line *C* in diagram 23.

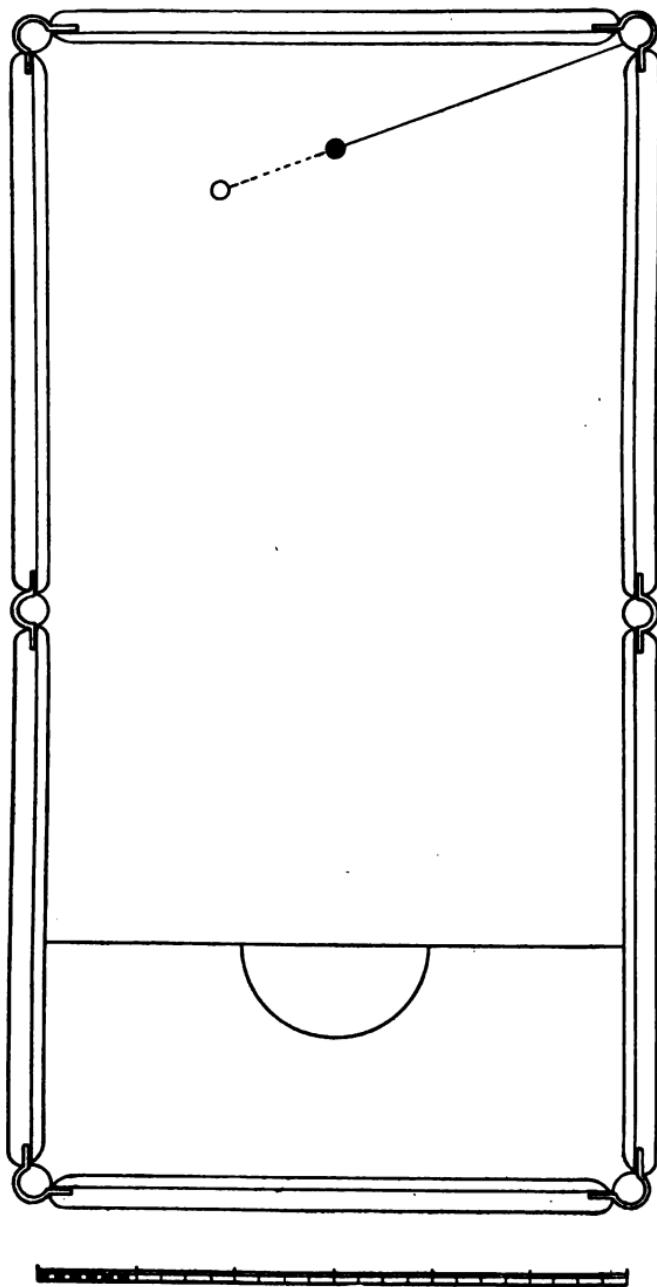
This is a screw-back stroke, and this is the position that must be sought after every stroke, not only because it is the *easiest* stroke to play with a certainty of good position, but because, being exactly in the middle of all the other positions, there is, if it is tried for, of course the greater chance of getting an easy stroke left. We have before described how to make a screw-back stroke, so will not repeat the advice here. The further off that the white is from the red, the harder must the striker's ball be struck. As already pointed out, you must not, in a screw-back stroke, make any drawback motion of the cue—let it follow on.

As a rule, this stroke should only be

attempted when the white and red balls are in a *dead straight line* with the opposite pocket. If, however, the white ball is within, say, six or eight inches of the red, and only the very slightest distance out of the straight line, the screw-back can still be made. Practice, and the instinctive knowledge that results from it, will guide the learner better than any written instructions.

If the white ball is still on the dead straight line, but *very near* the red ball, this stroke has to be played in a different way. The bridge must be raised, the tips only of the four fingers of the left hand being pressed on the table close to the red. The striker, leaning well over the table, must raise his right shoulder, pointing the cue downwards, and play sharply but firmly downwards on his ball.

DIAGRAM 24.



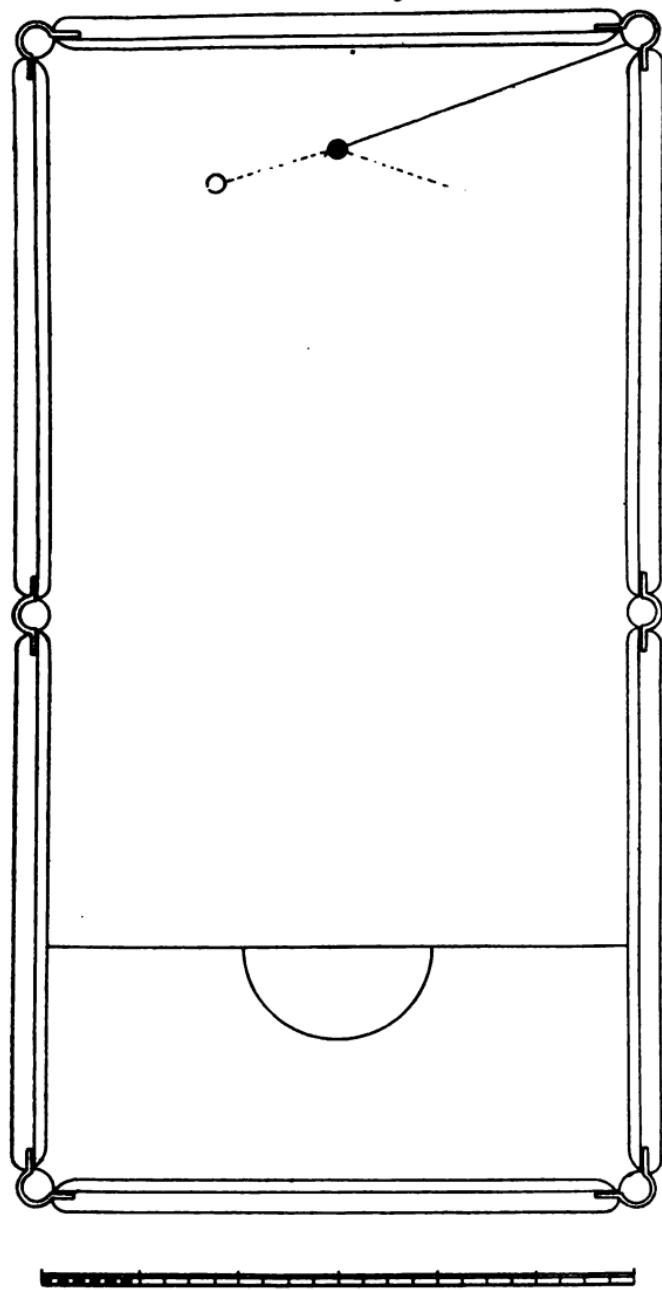
The Stab
Stroke.

Position 2.—The Stab Run-through Stroke.

When the striker's ball is just above the dead straight line, as in diagram 25, a really difficult stroke is necessary. We have alluded before to the stab-screw stroke. The cue must be held tightly in the right hand by the butt, pressed firmly on the bridge, and the ball must be struck with good strength below the centre. Like all screw strokes, the further away that the white is from the red, the greater must be the strength used in making the stroke, and the lower must the cue-ball be struck. The red ball should be put sharply into the pocket, and the white should travel slowly *through* the red and settle within a foot of the spot.

This stroke, like very many others, can be much more easily learnt by taking a practical lesson from a first-class professional than explained on paper.

DIAGRAM 25.



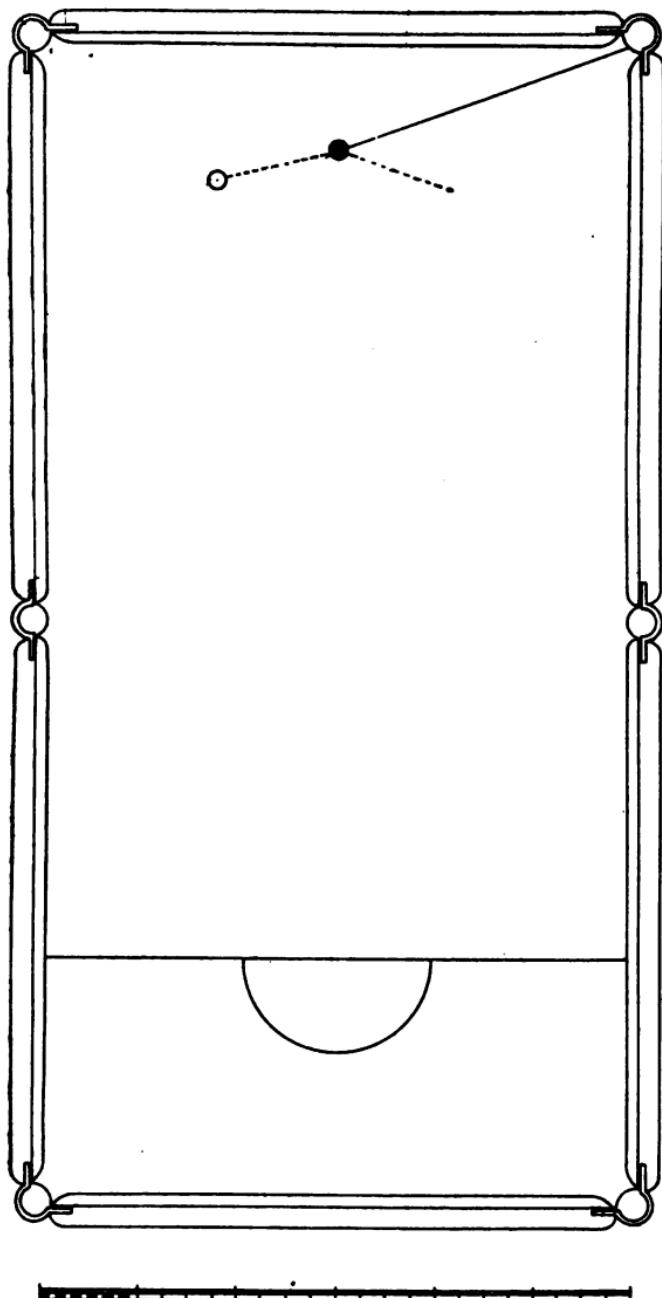
If in this position the striker played to run through the red, hitting his own ball gently in the middle, as he will have to do in the stroke to be next described, he would find that his own ball, running through the red, would be left too high up the table and no position left.

Position 3.—The Run-through Stroke.

The Run-through.

This is a very simple stroke, and will need very little explanation. It occurs when the striker's ball lies rather higher up the table than in the last stroke described, and is shown in diagram 26. All you need do is to strike your ball in the middle, putting the red ball gently into the pocket and crossing over to the other side of the spot. As a rule, the red ball should only just reach the pocket. Here practice, which will give nerve and confidence, is most essential.

DIAGRAM 26.



Variation of
the Run-
through.

Position 4—(A Variation of Position 3.)

This is a stroke the proper way of playing which is known to very few players indeed. I believe their number could almost be counted on the fingers, and, as far as I know, it has never been described in any book on Billiards yet published. The principle on which it is made is an extraordinary one.

This occurs when the striker's ball is just below the line *A A* drawn through the spot in diagram 23. The stroke has to be played very slowly. The red is cut in the pocket, and the striker has to avoid getting too low down the table. To do this, side is necessary, and this is the extraordinary part of the stroke. Any uninitiated Billiard player would naturally (and apparently quite rightly) use *check*, cushion, or what would, in the

position shown in diagram 27, be left-hand side.

Now, when the cloth is first put on, the nap always runs *up* the table. If, then, the cloth has the nap running *up* the table—*i.e.* in the direction of the arrow in diagram 27—the striker, however wrong it may seem to him, should put on side *away* from the cushion, which is, in the position shown in the diagram, *right-hand* side.

The theory of this stroke seems, as I have said, a really wonderful one. Struck with proper strength, in the proper way, with the proper touch, by a good player, the striker's ball, after hitting the red, will take a direction *down* the table; but the friction of the nap of the cloth that meets it will check the movement of the ball in that direction, and actually twist the ball away from that, its natural direction, towards the side cushion—that is,

up the table. The ball, strange as it may seem, assumes quite a perceptible curve, as shown in the diagram.

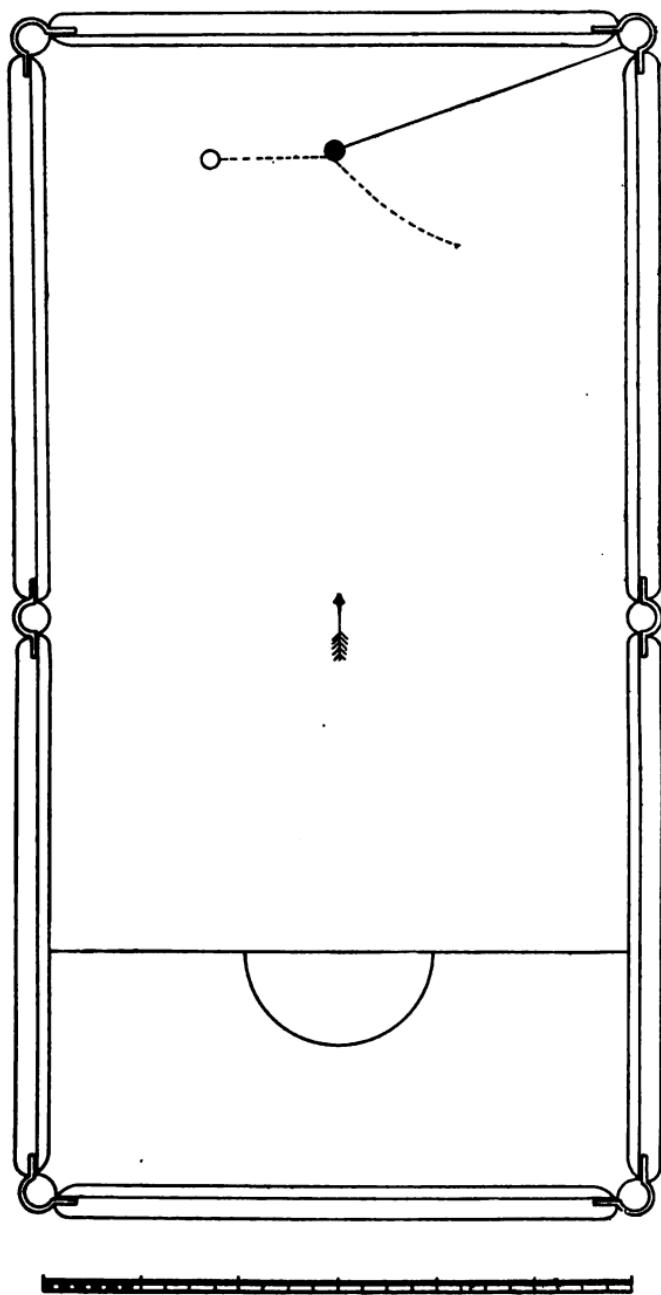
This side not only checks the ball from running *too far down* the table, but, which is a matter of equal importance, prevents it running *too far*—that is, in the direction of the side cushion.

Of course, if the cloth has been *reversed* (I do not mean *turned*), the other, or check side, must be used.

When, however, the ball is right on the line *AA* in diagram 23, no side at all is necessary, the only requisite being the exact amount of strength to just drop the red in the pocket.

There will be practically an infinite number of variations of positions 2, 3, and 4. The way to play them can only be learnt by patience, perseverance, and practice.

DIAGRAM 27.

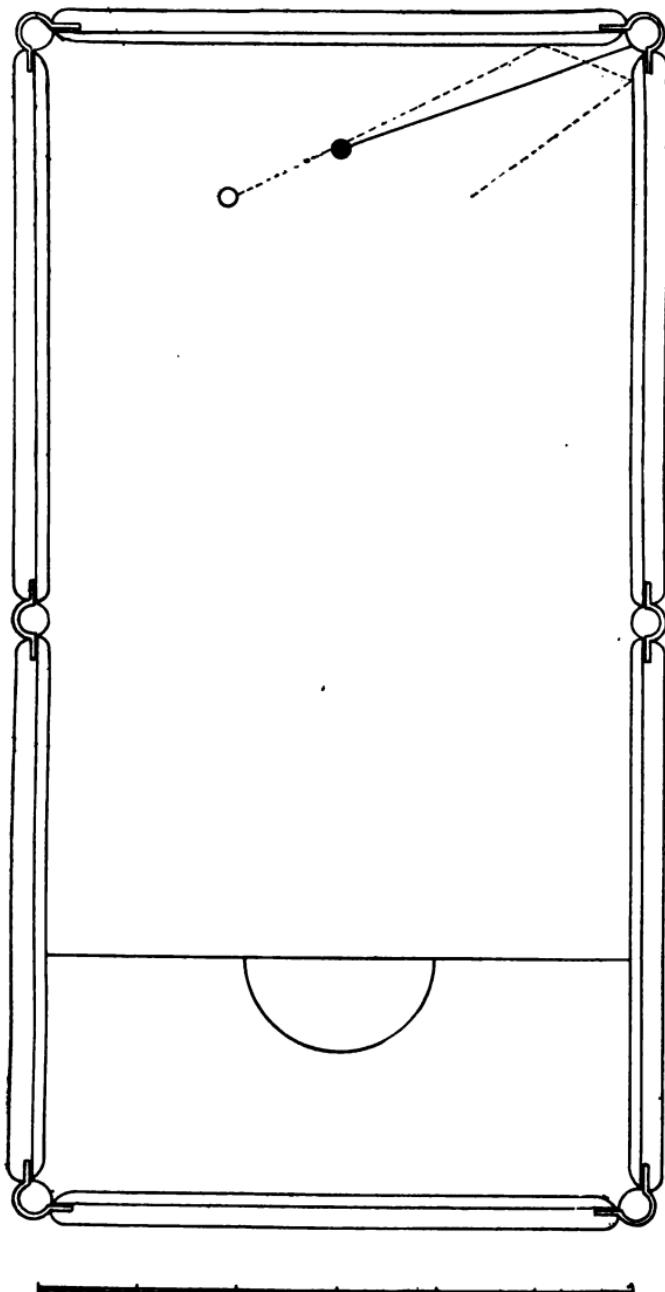


The Run-
through off
Two
Cushions.

It is obvious that as we get *below* the dead straight line *C*, in diagram 23, we must make use of the top cushion or cushions to recover position.

This stroke (shown in diagram 28) is very difficult, and requires persistent practice. The position occurs when the striker's ball is just below the dead straight line. In fact, it corresponds, in position *below* the dead straight line, exactly to position 2 (the stab stroke) *above* that line. It must be played when the striker's ball is too low down the table to admit of a screw-back stroke with position. If the cushions are fast, and the white ball not much out of the dead straight line, no side need be used. If, however, the

DIAGRAM 28.



ball is slightly lower down the table, or if the cushions are slow, strong side, *away from the top cushion*, must be used in making this run-through.

The diagram will explain the stroke, and the effect of the side will be plainly seen. This stroke requires a really good touch, power of cue, and freedom of cue, to bring the ball well *away from* the side cushion.

*Position 6.—The Stab-stroke off the Top
Cushion.*

*The Stab off
Top Cushion.*

This position occurs when the white ball (as shown in diagram 29) is rather too *low down* the table for the last stroke (the run-through off two cushions) to be played. At the same time, the stroke that we shall next describe, position 7, cannot be played, because, if played, the white ball will go off the top

cushion too far from the red on the opposite side.

It is practically much the same stroke as the stab-stroke described in position 2.

Some good players, I know, use cushion side combined with this "stab" stroke in getting position. This, I think, is wrong. The stroke should be played without any side at all.

The ball should be struck just below the middle, and with good strength. As in all stab-screw strokes, the red ball will be pocketed rather hard, whilst the white should come sharp off the top cushion and settle within a foot of it.

The player should hold his cue for this stroke tightly, and not horizontally, as for ordinary strokes, but should strike a little downwards on his ball.

This is a difficult stroke, and should be well practised.

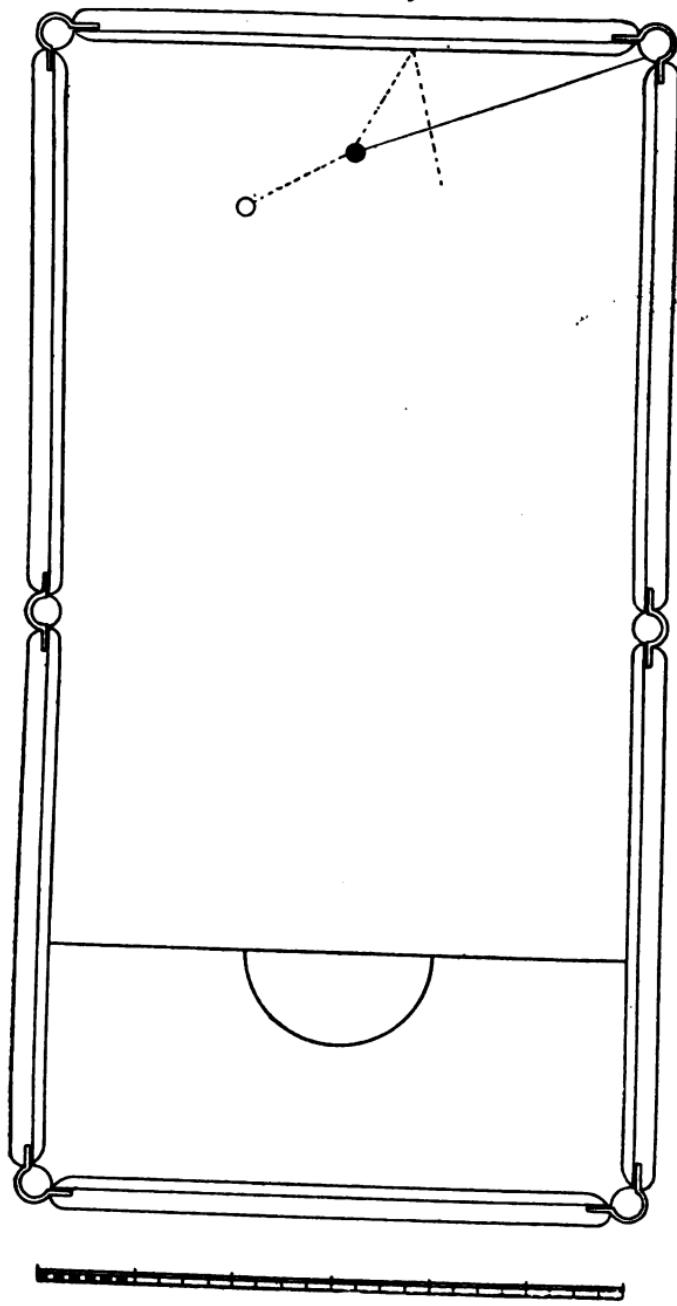
**The Stroke off
Top Cushion.***Position 7.—The Stroke off the Top Cushion.*

This stroke is an easy one. All the striker has to do—that is, in the simple form of the stroke shown in diagram 30—is to put the red in, using no side at all, but simply going off the top cushion and settling on the opposite side of the red. This stroke needs very little explanation. There are, however, many variations of it, in which cushion side or the reverse must be employed.

**The Stroke
back off Top
Cushion.***Position 8.—The Stroke back off the Top
Cushion (a Variation of Position 7).*

This stroke, again, will need no lengthy description. When the ball is lower still down the table than in the position last described, we shall still have to utilize the top

DIAGRAM 29.



cushion as a means of getting position for the next stroke, but in a different way. Our object will then be to come off the top cushion on the *same side* of the red as the white ball was placed in the first instance.

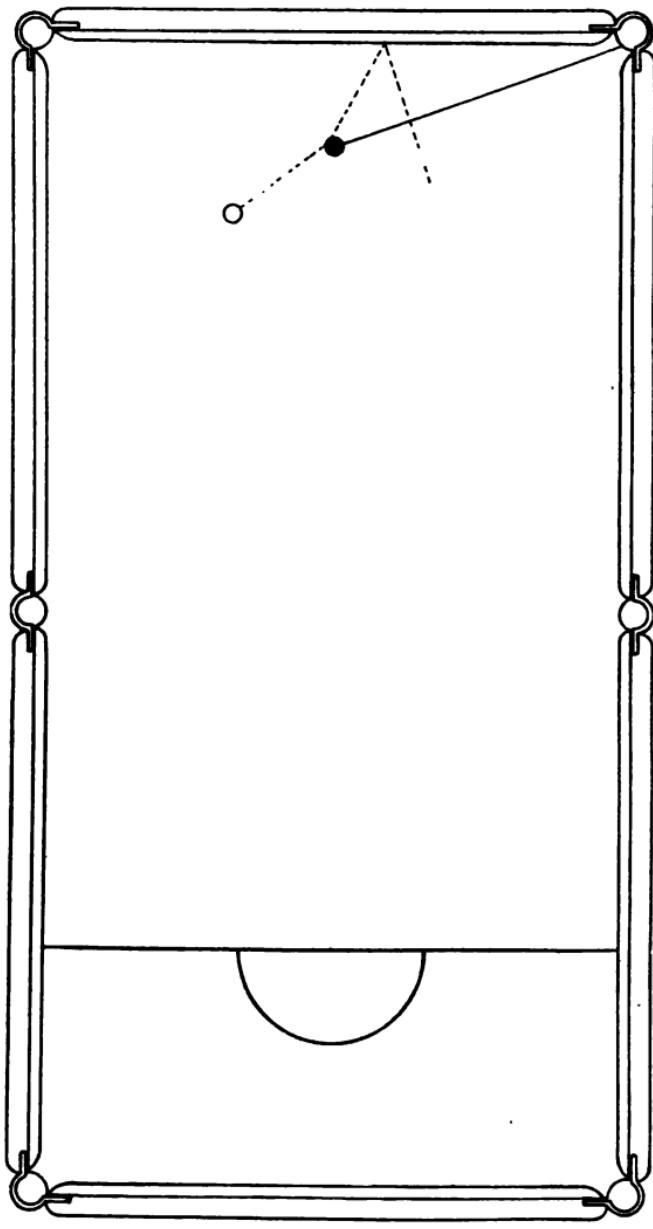
Diagram 31 shows a typical position.

If the ball is nearer to the red than is shown in this diagram, strong cushion-side alone is necessary.

The white being at the point shown in the diagram, or further away from the red, side should not be used, but the red ball should be "stabbed" in. Merely think of stabbing the red ball in, and the white will, as a consequence, come back off the top cushion.

If the white ball, however, is still lower down the table, and nearer to the side cushion, side and stab combined must be used. This is, however, a difficult and not a "set" spot-stroke.

DIAGRAM 30.



*Positions 9 and 10.—The Strokes all round
the Table.*

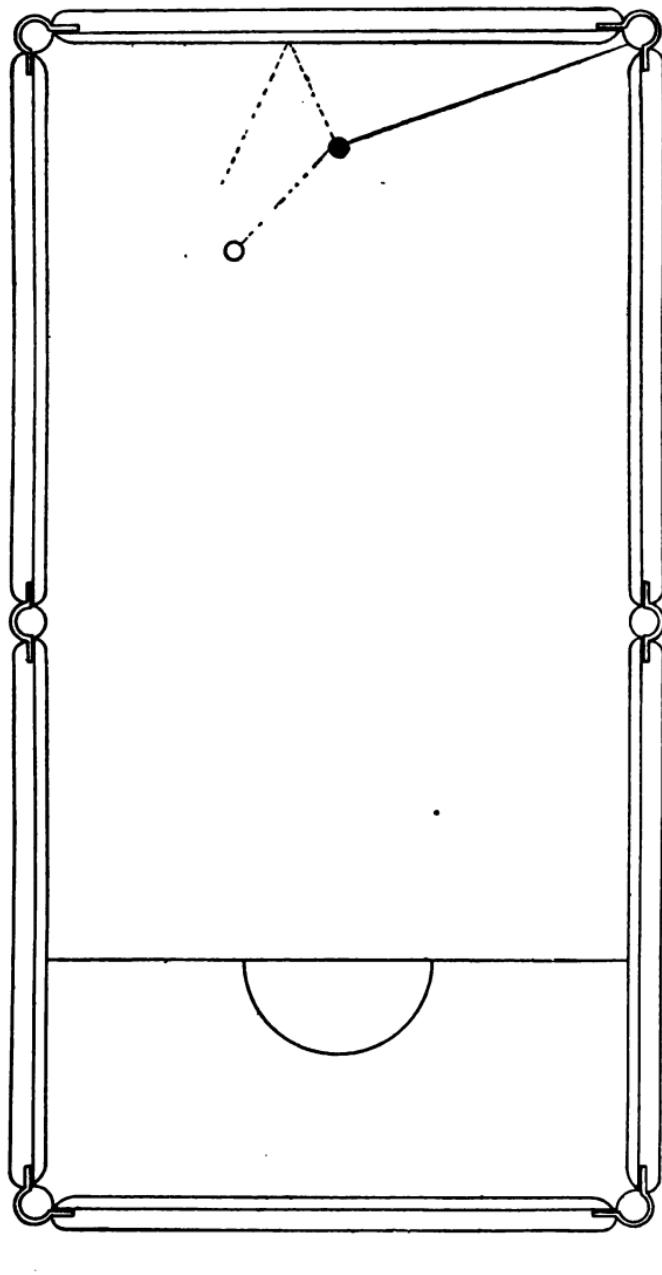
**All Round the
Table Strokes.**

We have now exhausted what may be called the “set” spot-strokes which have to be practised persistently. Diagrams 32 and 33 show two ways of regaining position when it has been, to all practical purposes, lost. The diagrams will speak for themselves.

In position 9 (diagram 32), when the striker’s ball is just above the line *AA* in diagram 23 (the upper limit of good position), a little side away from the top cushion will assist the stroke.

In position 10 (diagram 33), neither side or screw should, as a rule, be used ; the white ball in this case striking the cushion below the opposite middle pocket. These two strokes are, however, practically “fancy strokes,” and only of use to very good

DIAGRAM 31.



players. They could not be played *at all* on the now obsolete "Championship Table," with its three-inch pockets, and are very dangerous strokes to play for on a "Standard" table.

DIAGRAM 32.

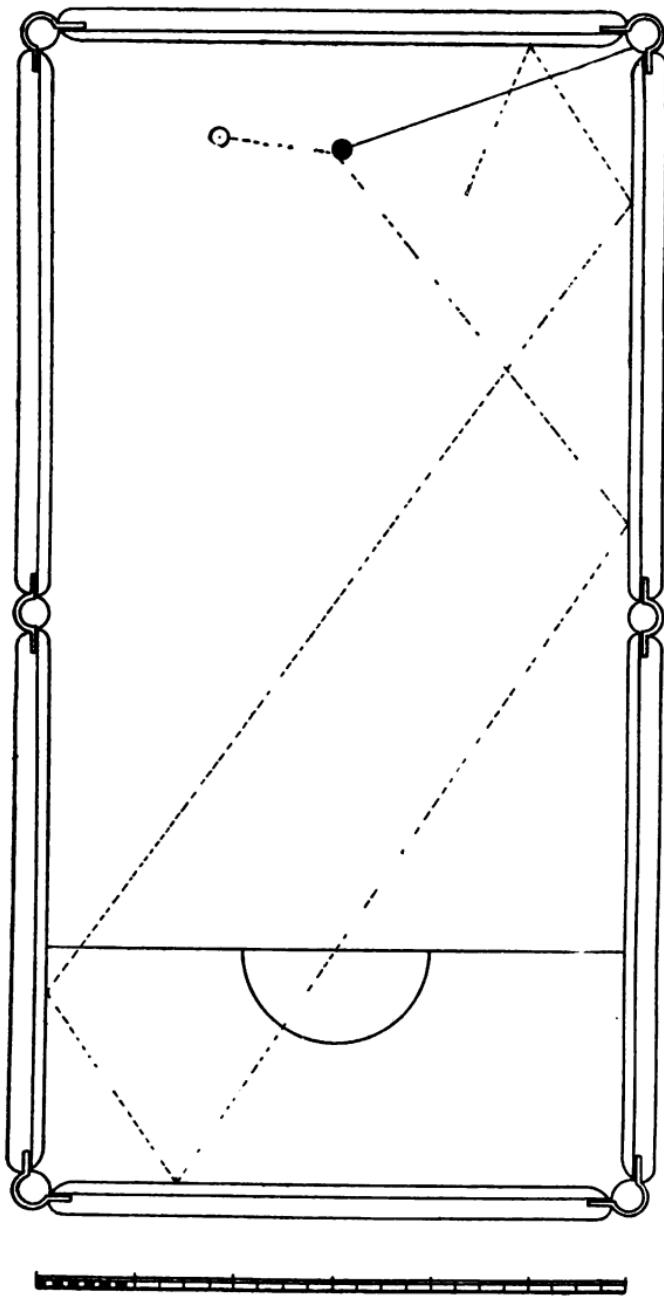
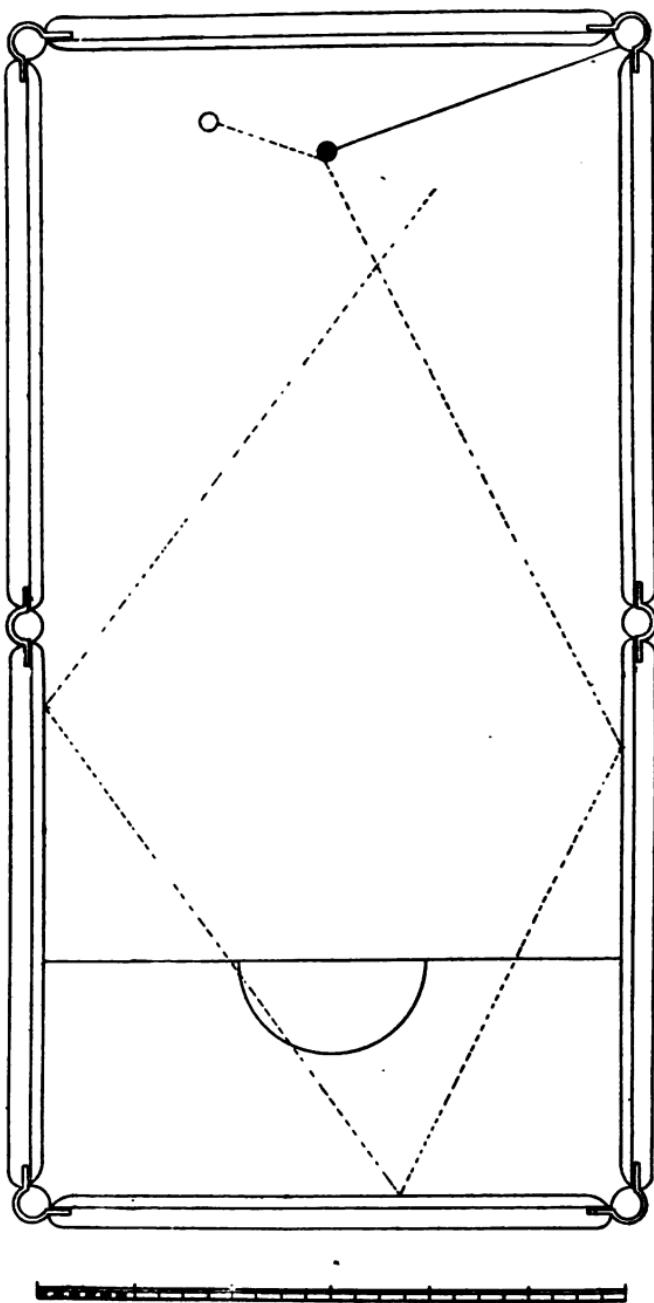


DIAGRAM 33.



Having now given a complete diagnosis of all the "set" strokes to be played in the spot-stroke, it now only remains to give some general hints on playing and practising it.

Perhaps, after all the dry details just given, a little story may be welcome, especially as it will very strongly illustrate the point we wish to urge. Some seven or eight years ago, when I understood thoroughly the theory of the spot-stroke, and in its practice could now and then make twenty or thirty spots, I went to Mr. W. J. Peall (the All-in Champion) for a lesson.

My theory of the stroke had simply been picked up from seeing him and other professionals make thousands of spots. I had had very little practice, and wanted to know whether I was playing each stroke in the proper way.

Learn to
"stay there."

Peall began the lesson, which we arranged should be of an hour's duration, by asking me to play the different strokes. I did so, taking each one separately. The upshot of it was that after about twenty or thirty minutes, the accomplished Brixtonian said, "You play every stroke very nearly as well as I can. All you have to do is to learn how to '*stay there.*'" He was kind enough to charge me for only half-an-hour's teaching.

I need hardly remark that *staying there* is of course the whole art of being a real spot-stroke player. When a good amateur, who has not had a great amount of practice, has made some thirty or forty spots, his eye gets tired, and he will probably soon break down. When, however, men like Peall, Mitchell, or White have made the same number of spots, they have got "*their eye in,*" are just beginning to "*see the ball*" (to use a cricket

term), and there is every probability of their making a huge break. To cut the matter short, practice, and practice alone, is the secret of making long breaks at the "spot."

A few words of advice as to the proper way to practise the spot-stroke may be useful here.

A player who really wishes to master the "spot," so as to be able to make really big breaks off it, must practise regularly every day, and for hours at a time. A novice should begin by practising each one of the strokes given above by itself. For instance, for one day, or even more if necessary, he must practise every single variation of the screw-back stroke. When he has thoroughly mastered that, let him take each of the other strokes separately in their turn, and practise *it alone*, till he feels confidence in his proficiency in playing it.

Practise regularly.

Practise each stroke separately.

After all the drudgery of practising these single strokes separately, he can have his reward. He can then begin to practise the spot-stroke as it is played in a game.

He should, if practicable, get someone to spot the ball for him, as his play will in that case be much better.

One way to learn.

Two amateurs, hiring a public table for an occasional hour's practice, can, if they really have it in them, pick up the spot-stroke to a considerable extent, by playing in turns and spotting the ball for one another.

To sum up briefly: watch, and watch carefully, professional play "on the spot," take a lesson if practicable, and, if you wish to become a real proficient, practise, practise, practise!

CHAPTER IX.

PRACTICAL ADVICE TO PLAYERS.

THOUGH we have gone as carefully as possible through the different departments of the game of Billiards, there is still a good deal in the way of general advice which may be of service to the reader. This chapter and the following one will, therefore, be of rather a miscellaneous character, and it is hoped that the hints and advice contained in them may be found sufficiently useful to condone what I may call the "*omnium gatherum*" nature of these chapters.

In a previous chapter somewhat strict rules were laid down as to the position of a Billiard-player, but we did not sufficiently

Attitude must
be easy.

insist upon the great importance of an easy and graceful attitude. We would therefore ask the reader, while obeying as far as possible all the strict rules as to position before laid down, not to be so intent in so exactly obeying each one of them as to make the position of his feet, his body, his arms, or his hands anything like a cramped or confined one. The striker's attitude must be easy, ought to be unaffected, and should be graceful.

Importance of

Little or nothing has been said about style, though style is a most important factor in, and aid to, forming good play. Style cannot well be self-learnt. A player, who is really desirous, not only to play a good game of Billiards, but also to play the game in proper style, should go frequently and regularly to watch first-class professional exponents of the game. The reader may certainly take this as an established fact—that no money is better

spent on Billiards (that is, if skill in the game is desired), than that spent in witnessing high-class play.

Of course, in witnessing professional play with a view to improvement, it is a *sine quâ non* that the spectator must watch, and watch closely, not only every stroke, but every movement of the player's body, arms, and hands whilst making the stroke. There are so many little motions, such as lifting or depressing the cue in certain strokes—so many little modifications, in fact, of very many kinds, of the ordinary stroke—which, though used instinctively by good professional players, cannot be described or even hinted at on paper. No player can play really well in a bad style, though at the same time a style may be good without being showy. Perhaps one of the most deceptive professional players in regard to style is John Lloyd. His style,

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to an uninitiated spectator, would suggest that he was a very moderate player, instead of being, as he undoubtedly is, a very fine exponent of the spot-barred game.

Attend to the game.

When you play Billiards, play it—don't "play at marbles." Give your whole attention to the game, and remember, that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well, or at least as well as possible. It is worse than foolish to play in a half-hearted and apathetic fashion. This way of playing will ruin anyone's game. Don't get into the habit of talking whilst playing, but, even when it is not your turn to play, give your whole mind to the game.

Keep your eyes on the table.

It is a fact known to very few, though well worth knowing, that it is a very great help to good play, to keep one's eyes *fixed intently* on the table and balls during the whole game. This not only accustoms the player's eyes to

the light on the table, but *focusses*, as it were, in his mind and eye the whole table, and makes playing a very great deal easier than if one allows one's eyes to wander to and from the board. This will be found a very serviceable hint.

Play the strict game. Don't get on the table, or allow your opponent to do so, but use the short and long rests whenever necessary. Give misses with the *point* and not the *side* of the cue. It is not only childish, but actually unfair to your opponent. Besides, it materially spoils your game. When you have to play an important match, you will find yourself quite unable to give a miss where you intend, simply through this foolish habit.

We now come to a point which, to my Nerve. mind, means almost entirely the possession of skill, or the want of it, in Billiards. A short and comprehensive name for this is *nerve*.

Billiards (though it seems a strange thing to say), is quite a kind of thought-reading. If a player has only the slightest amount of hesitation, nervousness, or want of resolution about him, he is *certain* to miss his stroke. He feels that he is going to miss the stroke, and the effect of this on his mind is that he *actually plays to miss it*. On the other hand, if a player, having made up his mind what is his best game to play for, settles himself to his work and plays resolutely for the stroke without the slightest fear, doubt, or hesitation, it is really wonderful how success will crown his efforts.

To sum up—play every stroke confidently and boldly, however difficult it may be, as if you were certain to accomplish it.

Do your best.

Do not let anything put you off your game. Make every stroke in the game the whole *crux*, as it were, of the game. Or, in other

words, play every stroke as carefully, and with as much thought, as if it were the winning stroke. Devote yourself entirely to each stroke, and keep on asking yourself mentally whether you are really doing your best, not only in advancing your score, but protecting, that is defending with safety play, your game.

One of the chief points to remember in playing a game is, "If ahead, keep ahead." Protect your game when there's nothing "on" by playing for safety. When behind, it is worth while sometimes to try and "force" the game by playing some difficult shot. Do not, however, play for foolish and next-to-impossible strokes.

If ahead, keep ahead.

As I shall presently give two anecdotes that tell somewhat against myself, I may perhaps be pardoned if I now give one which, while showing myself in a more favourable light, will admirably illustrate the great need

of steady safety play, particularly when one is ahead.

The "duffer" looks on.

One evening, after a cricket match, I was playing, to pass away the time, a game with a real duffer—in fact, a veritable novice who had only played a few games. I was giving him 80 start in a game of 100.

I commenced the game with the usual miss in baulk. My opponent now was one point better off, of course, than he was at the start, and naturally his game was to give a miss under the cushion near the middle pocket. With all the boldness of ignorance, however, he played at the red ball, and "fluked" off it into a pocket, the game being now 84—0. Now, more than ever (the red ball being safe), should he have given a miss, having scored one-fifth of his points while I was standing at *love* instead of at 20, as I ought to have done in order to stand on handicap terms with him.

He repeated his old tactics, however, of playing at the red—this time failing to score.

I was left a very easy stroke, which I made, and, soon after getting on the “spot,” I ran out with an unfinished break of 102.

The following hint on giving the second miss in opening the game may be useful. Supposing your opponent to have given the usual miss in baulk, draw an imaginary line exactly down the middle of the table, and give your miss under the cushion below the middle pocket, *on the opposite side* of the table to that in which his ball lies.

I am now going to speak on a subject about which I feel very strongly. I will put it shortly, if not euphemistically, as “potting” one’s opponent’s ball. It is much too common an error to suppose that it is an ungentlemanly game to put one’s opponent down. This is a stupid and inexcusable mistake. Let us look

Giving the second miss.

at the question, and bring reason and logic to bear upon it.

There are admittedly positions on the table when even what we may call "anti-pottites" see that there is not only no other game to play, but that really the proper game is to pocket the opponent's ball. These gentlemen—the "anti-pottites," to use my newly-coined word—denounce severely any "potting" out of these certain positions, in which case they say that it is "not the game."

Now everyone can see that when "potting" is the game, it is of course right play.

Again, if a case arises where "potting" is really not the right game, *it must naturally be against the interest of a player to practise it.* His antagonist, therefore, has not only no cause to "kick" in that case, but he has even reason to congratulate himself. A player whose ball has been pocketed has not only

the great advantage of playing from baulk, but, his ball being off the table, his opponent has obviously a far smaller chance of making a break. I do earnestly hope that these few words will serve to do away with some of the nonsense talked about "the ungentlemanliness of potting the white."

Remember to lean well over the table—that is, get well down to your ball. I remember hearing old John Roberts, when everyone was wearing the highest possible collars, tell a man that he was playing 15 in 100 under his game, simply through the collar he was wearing. This showed the old Champion's great knowledge of the smallest *minutiae* of the game.

Get down to
your ball.

When you want to hit a ball low, lower the knuckles of your bridge; when you want to hit a ball high, raise them, thus making the cue parallel to the bed of the table. This is a rule to which, of course, there must be excep-

Adjust your
bridge.

tions,—for instance, in putting on screw, or strong side, sometimes the right hand must be raised and the cue pointed downwards on the ball.

Trust the eye.

In aiming, be careful not to make that a matter of head work, but simply let the *eye* determine the point to be struck on your own ball as well as the line of aim. A player's thoughts should be only of *the position to be attained after the stroke*, which should be thought out before he "addresses" himself, as golf-players say, to the ball.

Let the ball
do the work.

Another great point is to have such confidence in your judgment of strength as to follow the advice given by a great player to myself, "Let the ball do the work." In other words, do not force or press the stroke, as it were; do not play too strongly, but be sure to strike your ball in the right way.

Don't aim too
long.

Don't play snap-shots without thinking

beforehand of position; but, again, do not dwell too long on your aim, particularly in making winning hazards. The first sight is the best.

With regard to the use of the short rest—
the striker should stand quite opposite to,
and exactly facing, his ball and the object-
ball. His feet in making the stroke should
be some two feet or more apart, and the toes
should be turned out. The rest should be
placed so that the head of it should be as a
rule just about the same distance from his ball
as his bridge would be. The handle of the
rest must not be held off the table in the left
hand, but laid flat upon it. The back of the
left hand being uppermost, the thumb and the
first and second fingers must do the chief part
in holding the rest firmly in its proper posi-
tion. The butt of the cue must be held
between the thumb and the first two fingers

of the right hand, the thumb, of course, being *underneath* the cue. The right hand should work from the elbow, with which it should be level, directly under the striker's chin.

Playing left-hand and behind back.

The student should, if possible, pick up the way of playing left-hand. There are many positions on the board where this acquirement will prove exceedingly useful. A stroke that has to be played with the rest is always difficult, even to a first-class professional. Of course, all professionals are adepts at playing with the left hand. Perhaps one of the most surprising things for a novice to witness is the marvellous way in which John Roberts plays left-hand, and there is no doubt that the ability to play with either hand is an advantage that can hardly be over-rated. Playing behind the back is another method that the student should strive to master.

Never forget—and this is very important—to shorten your cue when your own ball is under the cushion, holding it some foot or more from the butt end. Many players of years' standing, as well as beginners, entirely ignore this essential point. Again, when so playing at a ball "dead on" the cushion, do not use side if you can possibly help it. Side applied under such circumstances causes the ball to run in a curved instead of a straight line.

Shorten cue
when "tight
up."

Do not forget to chalk your cue, particularly when putting on side or screw. Scores of games are lost by the omission to do this. It is far better to use too much than too little chalk. At the same time, you need not chalk your thumb all over, or the cue for two feet down from the tip. An instance from my personal experience will show how an interesting game was lost through omitting to chalk the cue.

Chalk your
cue.

I spot the red
100 times.

I was playing a friendly game with a professional on the match table at the Royal Aquarium. The game was quite a private one, not a soul but ourselves being in the room. The game was 1,000 up, all-in, for a stake (I hope the Billiard Association won't take any notice of this) of *two cigars!* Of course I received a good start. I was playing well and had a big advantage on the handicap, and wanted comparatively few points to win the game, while my opponent wanted something over 300.

I lost his ball, and the red being safe, my own ball also being in hand, I had of course to give a miss in baulk. Though I knew my cue wanted chalking, I omitted to chalk it, it slipped off the ball, and my ball went well out of baulk. The professional then scored from hand, got up to "the spot," and I had to spot that red ball for him exactly 100 times in

an unfinished break of over 300, thus losing the formidable stake alluded to. I had not, however, I am glad to say, to pay for the table as well.

A few words on the choice of a cue may close this rather lengthy chapter. Cues are, to a great extent, a matter of individual taste. Of course those balanced with ebony butts are much the best. These can be obtained, of all sizes and weights, at the leading makers for something like a guinea. If a player is accustomed to play much in one public or club room, he should have at least one private cue kept there, and should play with no others. For a private cue, there is no better case than the ordinary tin one in general use. Of course, even in a case they must not be allowed to stand in a corner, but must be suspended from a nail.

The weight of a cue should be between 14 and 17 ounces. Personally, we think that

Proper weight
and length of
cue.

15½ or 16 ounces is exactly the right weight for a cue, a heavier one generally having a tendency to overdo screw strokes. Of the length, of course the player is the best judge. For a man of average height, however, it is a good plan to choose one that will stand upright just underneath the chin.

Be particular, in choosing a cue, to select one that you think has been made for some years. This will ensure the wood being well seasoned, and so the cue will have no tendency to warp. The grain of the ash should run as straight as possible up the cue towards the tip. The cue must not be too flexible. It is difficult to describe exactly what it should be, but I may perhaps give an idea when I say that, while being stiff, it should, if taken in the right hand by the butt and shaken, vibrate perceptibly, especially towards the tip.

A "spliced" cue is one in which a fresh bit "Spliced" cues. of wood has been spliced into an old butt. Some professional players are very fond of having their cues so treated. It gives a certain wonderful delicacy of touch which is especially useful in playing nurseries of cannons. One I possess, which I bought from the late William Cook (ex-Champion), shows as many as six or eight of these splicings. It certainly assisted the touch very much indeed. This cue, by the way, was Cook's match cue for many years.

Many amateurs do not know that cues can be so "spliced." If any of my readers possess a good old cue, which is too short, or the tip of which has been sand-papered "away to nothing," they have only to place it in the hands of a good firm of Billiard-table makers, to have their old favourite restored or even improved.

CHAPTER X.

GENERAL HINTS ON THE GAME.

Play with
good players.

IF you are really desirous of learning the game, play with good players whenever you get the chance. Many amateurs will never accept a start from a good player, but prefer to play one of their own calibre on level terms, or to give points to a weaker opponent. This is wrong, and they can hardly expect to improve much in their play under these conditions. Players who are not far advanced want to *see* and to *copy* good play. Besides giving one these advantages, a game with a really good player puts one on one's mettle, and soon teaches one the need of sound, careful, and cautious play. When,

therefore, a really good player offers you points, be only too glad to accept them.

Again, if you are a mere beginner, or a bad player, always take the opportunity of watching good play in preference to knocking the balls about yourself.

In practising, practise one kind of stroke at a time. For instance, one day practise losing hazards in the top and middle pockets and nothing else. So, again, take separately the "spot," nursery-cannons, the top-of-the-table game, side, screw, and drag. Work away at each stroke until you have mastered it.

Do not get into the habit of playing in the daytime. An occasional game is all very well, and of course in a private house Billiards is harmless, whether played in the daytime or at night. I am speaking of Billiards in a public room or club. Besides being rather an idle way of spending one's time, it is

Watch good play.

How to practise.

Play Billiards by gaslight.

impossible for a player to play equally well both by gaslight and by daylight. Billiards is essentially a game that should be played at night. It needs the bright gas or electric light which throws up in strong relief the cushions and the balls.

Don't play
too much.

Although regular and careful daily practice undoubtedly improves one's game very rapidly, I would by no means recommend a learner to *play* too much in actual games. Even if you do not become stale from so playing, you are very apt to get careless and indifferent, than which there can be nothing worse. It is far better to play five games of 100 up in a week, taking very great care and thought about every stroke, particularly with regard to position, than to play five games daily in a careless way. I think that play on four days a week is quite enough for any amateur. In my own case I

play best when I have left the game completely alone for a month or so, being apt to become very stale, and to lose the requisite quickness of eye, and particularly the proper touch.

The practice of all ball games is exceedingly good for keeping "the eye in" for Billiards. When any amateur, through over-play, or any other reason, has got a bit stale, let him turn his attention to some other ball game, such as golf, racquets, cricket, fives, or lawn tennis, and leave Billiards alone for a time. The late William Cook used, when in training for an important match, to walk up to Lord's Cricket Ground every morning and play racquets. As a rule, when a man becomes stale at Billiards, it is not so much that his eyesight is actually defective, but that it has become *wearied*, and he has lost the freshness and confidence requisite to make the hand obey the eye in exactly the right way.

Other ball
games
beneficial.

To regain this freshness and confidence, change and rest are necessary.

Find reason of bad play.

When you are playing badly, ask yourself the reason. Your touch may be wrong, you may be aiming too long, delivering the cue improperly, or playing with a want of resolution. If your touch is at fault, it is a good plan to hold the cue very loosely and to play very freely for a time, exaggerating the following-on motion of the cue. Remember that in aiming you must draw the cue backwards and forwards in a perfectly straight line, and not work it up and down like the handle of a pump. Be sure, too, that you are delivering it without any jerk, but in the smooth way before insisted on.

Determine your strength.

To find the strength of your game, or to compare the strength of different players, finding the average of points scored per "innings" is extremely useful. Count the

number of times that a player "goes on" in the game, and divide the number of points in the game by this number. That will give you his average. Of course misses and *coup*s count as turns. For instance, if a player in a game of 100 up goes to the table eight times, his average will be $12\frac{1}{2}$ points per turn.

It will surprise an ordinary player to find how exceedingly small his average will be. Probably out of the thousands that play Billiards, there are not twenty amateurs whose normal average is fifteen. I remember an extraordinary game between Peall and Mitchell of 15,000 up all-in, in which Peall's average reached something like the huge total of 225 ! Again, in November, 1890, Peall, conceding C. Dawson 3,000 in 15,000 "all in," went out in 49 innings, with a marvellous average of over 306 ! In this memorable match Peall made the record break, 3,304.

Keep your
temper.

A great point in the game is to keep cool. Do not mind however much your adversary flukes. Never mind if he makes half-a-dozen flukes running. It should show you that he is no player, for a good player very seldom flukes. Do not believe that Billiards is a game of luck. It is no such thing. In a long game, at all events, the luck will equalize itself. If you have bad luck, don't grumble, loudly or otherwise, but keep cool till your turn comes, and then be sure to make the best of it. If you can form the habit of seeing your opponent fluke with the greatest indifference, so that the fact of his even making a big break, greatly aided by flukes and luck, does not in the least disconcert you, you will have gone a great way towards becoming a good and sound player.

Don't get
flurried.

Very often, too, at the outset of a game,

a good player is “dead out of form,” and perhaps misses three or four ridiculously easy strokes. He then gets discouraged and probably flurried, and thus these few bad shots lead to continued bad play. This should not be the case. You must not let a bad stroke or two put you off your game. You should play more carefully and more resolutely than ever. A great thing is to try to get used to small annoyances in the Billiard-room. Keep your temper under all circumstances. Don’t mind chaff—take no notice of it, and if anyone should, ignorant of Billiard etiquette, cross your line of aim, do not let it put you out.

Speaking about Billiard etiquette, there are a few rules which every player should observe. Billiard etiquette.

On entering the room, do not dash the door open and rush in, but think of the

players, and wait for the sound of the stroke before you enter.

While looking on at the game, do not talk loudly or start a conversation with the players, unless they are really intimate friends of yours, and you know that they won't mind.

Whether playing or not, never get in front of the line of aim of any player. That is the worst of form.

Don't over-rate your game.

Do not get into the habit of over-estimating your game, however good you may be. It is often the case that a player, who is perhaps *facile princeps* in his own little local circle, imagines himself quite a Peall or a Roberts, and, when he goes into a strange room, can hardly believe the evidence of his senses when he is beaten. Do not imagine yourself invincible.

A rude M.D.

A friend of mine, a very good player, strolled with me after dinner into the Billiard-

room of a first-class hotel in Liverpool some years ago. The marker asked him if he would care to play a game with an old "gentleman" (so the marker called him). My friend said he should like a game, and they played. The first game my friend won by about forty points. In the second game the old gentleman became very sullen, and did not vouchsafe a word in reply to my friend's courteous advances. I should say that my friend, after winning the first game, very kindly gave his opponent thirty points' start. The second game, noticing the stranger's sullen disposition, he really set to work and beat him by nearly thirty points.

The old gentleman at once paid the marker, and was evidently fuming with rage. At last he could contain himself no longer, and said to my friend, "No amateur can beat me. I should think that you must be a marker out

for a holiday." "No, sir," said my friend, "you are mistaken. I was mistaken too, as I took you for a gentleman." The old doctor, for such we heard he was, left the room in impotent rage, amid the ill-disguised laughter of the lookers-on. Of course he was above the ordinary run of amateurs, but by no means an exceptionally good player.

Respect a
stranger.

My readers will, I hope, have noticed that when I give an anecdote, it is always used to "point a moral." Another moral, that I must point in the same way, is "Don't make light of a stranger." Some eight years ago, after a harassing day in the Law Courts, I went, to occupy the time before dinner, into a very large Billiard-room close to Charing Cross. Sitting down in a quiet corner, apparently watching some very bad players, was, as I took it, a harmless old gentleman. I was at that time rather young, and fancied myself

considerably at Billiards, as very young men are apt to do. Here, I thought, was a grand opportunity to have a game or two at someone else's expense. Seeing a table vacant, I went up and asked this old gentleman if he would care to play me a game. He consented, and we started.

The first thing I noticed was the great ease and grace with which he handled his cue. Before he had played very long, I was perplexed beyond measure. I had seen all the professionals of the day, and some of the best amateurs and markers. His game resembled nothing that I had seen. He seemed to play with great carelessness and ease—in fact, I could not make out at first whether his was play or mere luck. The old gentleman seemed to possess marvellous power of cue, and no stroke on the board appeared to come amiss to him. I lost the first game by forty.

So interested and, at the same time, so perplexed was I, that I asked him to give me thirty points in another game. This, too, he won, playing in the same dashing, seemingly reckless style. Wondering more than ever who he could be, I asked him to give me forty points start in a third game. This game I did just manage to win from the old boy, who, I had fondly hoped, was going to yield me cheap amusement.

The "Father of Billiards" declares himself.

At the conclusion of this game, the elderly stranger said, in jaunty fashion, "Young gentleman, pay for the tables ; I'll just have one whiskey with you, and you can tell your friends you have been playing with old John Roberts." My astonishment at finding that I had been opposing the veritable "Father of Billiards" it can be imagined was very great.

After that, old John and I were always on very friendly terms. Many a pleasant half-

hour have I spent with the old man, hearing tales and anecdotes of a bygone generation. This meeting with a man who for twenty-one long years held the proud position of the unapproachable Champion of the World, was a most singular one, and it certainly taught me a valuable lesson.

Of course, the play nowadays is something altogether superior to old Roberts' form, even when he was at his very best. I have no doubt but that his son, in his present form, could have given his father, when in his zenith, 15,000 start in 24,000, allowed him to play the spot-stroke, himself playing spot-barred, and made a good fight of it. At the same time, the old man's game was something to watch and marvel at. It was totally different from the professional play of the present day.

I have seen him, too, in his usual jolly,

Past and
present form.

chaffing way, challenge a fairly good player, he himself having to play with his walking-stick. He usually carried a somewhat long stick without a ferrule, the end of which he would trim with his knife. It was really marvellous what power of cue he displayed even with his stick, with which, obviously, he could hardly apply screw or side.

Amateur
training.

Billiard handicaps, club or otherwise, are so popular that there is scarcely an amateur who does not now and then take part in one. A few words on preparing for an important handicap game or match may be useful. The subject of regular training, which very few amateurs attempt, need not be considered beyond mentioning the fact that smoking, and especially smoking different tobaccos, has perhaps as prejudicial an effect on the nerves and eyesight as anything. Biliousness, too, greatly interferes with the sight, so avoid

rich indigestible food before an important match.

When you have to play a game, say at eight o'clock in the evening, do not take too much out-door exercise, and certainly no violent exercise, on the day it takes place. Do not have more than half an hour's or at the most an hour's practice on that day, as more will take off your freshness. Dine at five o'clock, drink no beer, but if anything, a little Scotch whiskey. Afterwards, a *small* bottle of one's favourite brand of champagne is a capital thing for putting one in the good spirits and the confident, resolute frame of mind so necessary to success in Billiards. This last piece of advice, I am sure, many Billiard-players will endorse, though at first sight it may seem superfluous.

I think that I cannot do better than conclude this chapter by quoting, in slightly

Attributes of
a Billiard-
player.

altered form, a passage from Staunton's "Chess-Player's Handbook":—"The great general, Marshal Saxe, in his summary of the attributes required by a commander-in-chief, gives him *genius*, *courage*, and *health*. The first of these qualities is unquestionably called for in the highest order of Billiard skill. If, too, by courage is implied entire self-possession, promptitude of decision, and undaunted perseverance, and by health is meant the preservation of a sound mind, to which a sound body is so important an adjunct, then indeed both courage and health will be found to exercise a powerful influence upon the success of the Billiard-player, as well as upon the fortunes of a Marlborough or a Wellington."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BILLIARD-ROOM.

MANY private owners of tables, and even markers in public rooms, are so much "at sea" as to the way in which their tables should be treated, and so much depreciation in the value of tables takes place through carelessness, ignorance, or wilful neglect, that it cannot be superfluous to set out fully the way in which a table and its accessories should be cared for.

In the case of private houses, frequently the one blemish in the whole establishment is the Billiard-table. Often, where everything else is in the most perfect order, the Billiard-table is neglected, and by such neglect allowed to

get worse and worse, and to a great extent depreciate in value. Just the want of a little simple knowledge entails the loss of at least several pounds a year, as well as a most unsatisfactory state of the table. In a private house the Billiard-table should have daily attention, just like any other article of furniture.

The table.

To any one about to buy a Billiard-table, I would say, at all hazards avoid a cheap new one. Frequently a very good old table can be picked up cheaply at sales or otherwise. It is not at all a bad plan to buy a table on which professionals have played in public. These can be got usually for between £60 and £100, and, as a rule, the fact of them being used for exhibition or money matches by first-rate players is a guarantee of their quality. Always go to a good maker, as only the best can afford to keep huge quantities of well-seasoned

wood, slate, and ivory. In fact, my advice to owners of both public and private tables, is to get the best of everything from the best makers. I would also advise that only first-class Billiard-table makers should be employed to renovate or do repairs to a table, and it is best, if possible, for obvious reasons, to employ the makers of the table.

The cloth should be the best West of England cloth. Such a cloth not only plays much truer, the balls running more smoothly, but, if properly looked after, will really be the cheapest in the end.

The spots, too, used on the table should be of the very best quality, and the shades should be continually renewed. The reflections from old faded gas shades and from new ones are two different things.

Every night, and at other times when it is not in regular use, the table should be covered

The spots and shades.

Table should be covered.

with the holland or cloth cover made for the purpose. Where there are skylights, a water-proof mackintosh cover should be used as well. I have known a table ruined (temporarily) from neglect of this precaution.

Brushing the table.

A marker in a public room, or any servant who has the care of a private table, should get the idea into his head that it is impossible to brush a table too much. The more a table is brushed, the better will it look and run. Personally, I like to see a table brushed after every game, even if only 100 up, but certainly after every two or three games. The chalk is so much more easily got out of the cloth immediately after a game, than if the table is left unbrushed for some time. At all events, a table should never be left unbrushed at night.

It is hardly necessary, I suppose, to point out that the brush used should be a proper Billiard-table brush. The cloth must invariably

be brushed the same way, and that is, *always with the nap*. The cloth when first put on a table ought always to have the nap running up the table—that is, towards the spot. When the cloth is *reversed* (not *turned*), of course the brushing will have to be towards the baulk-end of the table. When the cloth is *turned* it can hardly be said to have a nap at all. If the nap, however, is at all discoverable, always brush with it. Be particular to brush the dirt into the pockets. I may here say that I think the newly-invented “bottomless” pockets are by far the best, as they save the wearing of the cushions of the table inside the pockets.

As with the brush so with the iron, it cannot be applied too often. Every day, and in damp weather twice a day, should the table be ironed. Again, if the room, on account of its exposed position, or on account of the

Ironing the
table.

thinness of the walls, is unusually damp, the table should be ironed twice or even more a day. If, again, the room is near the seaside, I should always recommend the same amount of ironing. Remember, however, that when the floor of the Billiard-room is scrubbed, the table must never be ironed until *afterwards*. Nor must it be ironed before it has been properly *brushed*.

After perhaps a year's play—that is, constant play—on the cloth, provided that the room is not a damp one, ironing on alternate days will be sufficient, but the table must never suffer from lack of brushing. On every wet day, however, the table must be ironed. Just as in the case of brushing, the table must invariably be ironed one way—that is, with the nap.

If the cloth is loose, it should be immediately stretched, and in this, as well as in other cases

where skilled work must be called in, the assistance of first-rate Billiard-table makers should be sought. If there happen to be, on account of the looseness of the cloth, any creases in it, the cloth will stand a great risk of being damaged if the iron is used.

First of all, the iron must be made hot in the iron case, or shoe, made for it. It should be just as hot as an ordinary iron used for ironing fine cambric handkerchiefs. On this point the opinion of a laundress or maid used to washing would be valuable.

Having got the iron heated to the proper degree, the person who is ironing the table should stand opposite the left-hand bottom pocket. Sliding the iron on to the table at the pocket parallel with the bottom cushion, as shown in the diagram, he should quickly run the iron along the bottom cushion, until the further edge of the iron is on a line with

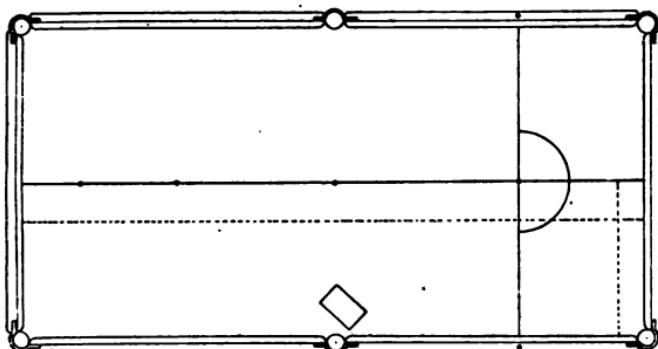
the centre line of the table. He should then without pausing run the iron straight up the table. The speed must vary in proportion to the heat of the iron. Directly the iron reaches the top cushion the operator must lift it, going round again to the left bottom pocket, sliding the iron in there, and continuing the line along the bottom cushion, until he reaches the dotted line in the diagram enclosing the part which has already been ironed.

Straight up the table he must go again, lifting off the iron directly it touches the top cushion, and taking it back again to the bottom pocket, to be again slid along the cushion till it reaches the edge of the strip last ironed.

Whilst ironing the last strip of the table—that is, of course, the strip next to the left-hand bottom and the left-hand top cushions, the manipulator must take the greatest care

not to run the iron against the corners of the middle pockets. To avoid this, he has merely to slant the iron, as shown in the diagram, instead of carrying it straight down the table.

Having finished ironing the left-hand half of the table, he has now, in ironing the other



half, to proceed to the right-hand bottom pocket, introducing the iron and sliding it along the bottom cushion to the centre, when all the previous directions will, of course, exactly apply.

After the table has been ironed, the baulk-line and the D must be marked. They should

Marking
baulk-line
and D.

be marked with French or tailor's chalk, using, of course, the wooden straight-edge and half-circle. I know that they are mostly marked with pencil, but a table thus marked never presents the same appearance. Certainly the use of the chalk entails more trouble, but, in my opinion, the look of the table quite makes up for that.

Care of the
cushions.

Everyone, whether a marker in a public room or an owner of a private table, should enforce the two following rules :

Never allow cigars or cigarettes to be placed on the wood-work of the cushions.

Never allow a player, who is too idle to use the rest, or the long rest, to get on the table.

The one act quite destroys the appearance of the wood-work of the table, besides being most slovenly and inexcusable. The other not only actually destroys the absolute truth

of the cushions, but is very likely to impair the level of the table.

In very cold weather the gas should be left burning all night until the fire is lit in the morning, as it should be *daily* during the winter. Cushion warmers, which may be purchased cheaply from the best makers, may be used with very great advantage.

Every morning the wood-work of the table should be carefully wiped, and from time to time polished with beeswax and turpentine, just like any other article of furniture. The brass-work, too, of the pockets should, of course, be polished up regularly.

The balls should be of the best possible The balls. ivory. In selecting a set, always see that the centre of the tusk runs exactly through the centre of the ball. Otherwise, the centre of gravity will not be the centre of the ball. Most important, too, is it that the three

balls should be of *exactly the same weight*. If not, the balls will break through the usual angles, and no reliance can be placed on the direction assumed by the cue-ball after contact. Good Billiards cannot be played with bad balls.

Balls should be bought at least $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter. By the time they are turned down to $2\frac{1}{6}$ inches they will be well seasoned.

Care of the
balls.

The Billiard-balls should not be left in the pockets of the table, but placed in their box. One with three separate compartments is the best. These compartments should contain a small quantity of good sawdust, on which a little olive oil may be poured with advantage. Sets of Pool, or Pyramid balls, should also always be kept in boxes with separate compartments, and not left in the Pool basket or in the Pyramid triangle.

Having got a new set of Billiard-balls, keep them in the Billiard-room for a week or so before you use them. Billiard-balls, like human beings, are very susceptible to changes of climate and weather.

Cues should always be kept upright in a proper cue rack, and never left leaning against walls. This latter practice is sure to warp them.

Cues and butts.

The long butt, the half butt, and the long rest must also, if possible, stand upright in their respective clips. Being longer and heavier than the ordinary cues and rests, they have naturally far more tendency to warp. If, however, the Billiard-room is not quite high enough to allow of these butts standing upright, they must be placed on perfectly horizontal supports, which should be at close intervals.

Every damp morning the cues should be

carefully wiped with a cloth and put back in the cue-rack.

How to tip
a cue.

To tip a cue really properly is almost an art. If you have a favourite cue, I advise you to learn how to tip it *properly*, and never to entrust it to anyone else to do so for you.

The tip should not be too small, but should measure from three-eighths to seven-sixteenths of an inch in diameter. The best French leather tips should always be used. They can be purchased in either small or large quantities from the leading makers. Get one as near as possible, perhaps the merest shade larger than, the size of the top of the cue.

Preparing the
cue-top.

The top of the cue must be exactly at right angles with its length, and particular care must be taken to see that no little piece of wood is chipped out of the side of it. If this is the case, a small fret-saw should be used very carefully, and a small section taken off

the end of the cue. To get it perfectly flat, the best plan is to place the cue-top upon a piece of emery paper on the floor between your feet, twirling the butt of the cue between the palms of the hands. Emery paper, however, must *never* be applied to the cue-tip, but only the very finest glass paper. Great care must be taken to hold the cue in a perfectly perpendicular position, so that the edges of the top may be sharp, and the top itself may not be rounded.

Having got the top of the cue perfectly flat, a number of little holes or dents should be dug in it with the extreme point of a very sharp penknife. Your cue cement, or liquid glue (which I prefer), being ready, the cue-tip, after having its under surface "roughed up" on glass paper, should be heated on a stove, or on an iron, and also the top of the cue. The cement or liquid glue should then be

O

applied with a fine brush to the cue-tip, and also to the top of the cue. The tip and the cue-top must then be firmly pressed together, and the cue turned upside down in a corner as perpendicularly as possible. The superfluous cement or glue can be easily rubbed off when the cue is thoroughly ready. It is best to leave it for three or four hours. In finishing off the tip, do not use glass paper more than can be helped to the wood of the cue, as, of course, it wears it away.

CHAPTER XII.

BILLIARD PLAYERS AND BILLIARD RECORDS.

THOUGH this work has exceeded the limits originally intended, a book on Billiards would be incomplete without some allusion, however brief, to great players and their achievements.

Accustomed as we are to see, in every other branch of sport, fresh men continually coming to the front, noticeably so in athletics and cycle racing, which latter sport owns new champions and records almost daily, the following facts about Billiard Champions may cause some surprise.

In forty years, that is, from 1849 to 1889, we have only seen four Billiard Champions. Four Champions in forty years.

In fact, if the Billiard Association had not instituted its two championships when the original cup given for the championship became the absolute property, by lapse of time, of John Roberts, another five years—namely, up to the present time—would have to be added to this long period.

To be brief, old John Roberts was Champion of the World at English Billiards for twenty-one years. William Cook, not then of age, beat him in the year 1870—a landmark in the history of the game—and became Champion. He was afterwards beaten again by our present Champion, then John Roberts, jun., who in his turn was beaten by Joseph Bennett. Each of these three last-named players disputed supremacy at the game for something like fifteen years, but no other player ever gained the proud position of Champion.

I have said a good deal about the old

champion, John Roberts, sen., and will here only mention that his best break all-in amounted to 346 (104 spots).

Joseph Bennett, perhaps at the present time the best teacher of the game, was a very instructive player to watch. He was very deliberate, taking the greatest pains in thinking out exact position after every stroke.

Eighteen years ago the best spot-barred break on record was only 251, made by William Cook. In 1881 the same player beat this record with a break of 309, this being then considered a marvellous performance.

In 1885 young John Roberts began in earnest to show the world what an extraordinary genius he had for the game. Turning his attention to the spot-barred game entirely, he made, in October of that year, a break of 409, shortly afterwards eclipsing this with 432 and 451. On April 12, 1886, he

made what was then thought to be a most extraordinary break of 506 all-round. This it was thought at the time would never be beaten. Still progressing, in the same year he made 534, and on November 17, 1886, the gigantic break of 604. Only ten days before this wonderful achievement took place, Peall made the marvellous all-in break of 2,413, the first break which ever exceeded 2,000.

On October 18, 1887, William Cook made his largest spot-barred break, 462, which no one but the Champion had at that time ever beaten.

An extraordinary game was played at the Aquarium in March, 1888, between Peall and Mitchell, of 15,000 up all-in. To this game I have before alluded. Peall won, though Mitchell was playing well, by no less than 8,247 points. His best breaks were 2,031,

containing 633 consecutive spot-strokes, a record then, in its way. He also made breaks of 1,498, 1,203, 1,192, 1,125, 957, 956, 928, and other huge runs.

In November, 1889, Peall and Taylor made spot-barred breaks of 429 and 433 respectively, Roberts and Cook alone having previously reached 400. In January, 1889, Roberts beat McNeil (who received 4,500 points start in 12,000 spot-barred), when it looked long odds against him, making on the last day 3,229 points to McNeil's 619 in four and a half hours.

In March, 1890, Roberts, playing Cook, 1890, giving one-third of the game, made two wonderful records. One was a spot-barred record of 690, which stood for three years, and he also made 108 consecutive nursery cannons. In October of that year, McNeil made an all-round break of 472, the best on record except

The record break.

by the Champion. In the same autumn, Peall, giving C. Dawson 3,000 in 15,000 all-in, made the enormous break (the present all-in record) of 3,304. This occupied him two hours and forty minutes and contained runs of 93, 3, 150, 123, 172, 120, and 400 spots.

Every year now John Roberts was making five or six breaks of over 500, a figure never reached by any other player until Peall, on November 28, 1892, made 571 on a "Standard" table made according to the rules of the Billiard Association.

1893.

In March, 1893, Roberts won a splendid game of 24,000 up, spot-barred, by 635 points, in which he conceded Peall 9,000 start. In this game, he made eighty-four three-figure breaks, including the record of 737.

C. Dawson, playing H. Coles a few weeks later, made a wonderful run of 698, which a little earlier would have been the record.

Coles, on March 13, 1893, tied Peall's big spot-barred run by making 571, and in November of that year Diggle made a break of 530.

What can we say too extravagant in praise of the Champion's wonderful performances of this spring, when he was in his forty-seventh year? There is no possible doubt but that, in spite of advancing years and his present marvellous skill, he is improving, and improving very fast, at the spot-barred game, his cannons showing to greater perfection than ever. On the 26th of February, 1894, playing C. Memmott, of Australia (a very fine player, who holds the *virtual* record for screw-back spot-strokes with 253 consecutive pull-backs), the Champion beat the time record in the spot-barred game easily. He amassed the huge total of 1,412 points in *one hour and twenty minutes*, aided by breaks of 275, 355,

1894. Mar-
vellous play
by "The
Master."

and 659. Not satisfied with this, he next day broke the cannon record with a break of 248 points, which was solely made up of 124 cannons. D. Richards, however, who has always been noted for the surpassing excellence of his nursery cannon play, a month or two later quite eclipsed these figures with 142 consecutive cannons. And on October 12 he made another extraordinary run of 145 cannons at the Aquarium. John Roberts, however, during his visit this summer to South Africa, is reported to have totalled no less than 165 consecutive cannons, a marvellous performance on an English table.

Not satisfied with thus having broken two records, whilst playing against Memmott, on March 1, Roberts, in the very same match, made the marvellous break of 867—a wonderful performance, and one that I thought that

even he himself would never be able to beat.

We must never, however, put any limit to what is possible where John Roberts is concerned. On May 3 and 4, playing at Manchester against E. Diggle, this incomparable cueist astonished the whole English-speaking world. A break of 1,000 spot-barred had never been dreamt of, but John Roberts far exceeded these figures with an incredible break of 1,392, made in faultless fashion. Comments on such a feat are superfluous.

To show that he was capable of repeating this extraordinary achievement, he in another match with Diggle at Glasgow shortly afterwards, followed it up with another mammoth run of 1,017. And towards the end of the season he began to make, with astonishing regularity, breaks of over 600 and even 700!

Two stupendous breaks.

Incredible as it may seem, the Champion made last season no fewer than *twenty-eight* breaks of 500 and upwards, *seven* of them being over 700 and *fourteen* exceeding 600!

1894-5.

The Billiard Season of 1894-5 has not, so far, been productive of any very sensational play. On November 17, however, Diggle, in a match with Peall, which he won easily, beat his previous efforts with a break of 580. This was then the second highest spot-barred break ever made by any player other than John Roberts. Mitchell, North, and Richards are all in extremely good form this season, and have each of them broken their spot-barred records already. North and Richards indeed now share with Peall, Coles, Dawson, and Diggle the proud distinction of having made over 500 in a break. The pair were playing a match of 9,000 up on level terms at the Aquarium, and on November 28 North ran

up a faultless contribution of 503. Singularly enough, Richards, who had never previously reached 400 in a break, only two days afterwards eclipsed this performance with an exquisite run of 504, but North won the game by 270 points.

Everything points to the season's being a most interesting one. Diggle, Dawson, Peall, Mitchell, North, and Richards are all now very much on an equality, but if we were asked whom we considered the "coming man," we should unhesitatingly "plump for Diggle" (as the London School Board electors have done!). John Roberts has, since his return from South Africa, owing to indisposition, shown in nothing like his true colours ; but we can be certain that this loss of form is only temporary, and confidently look forward to a very different state of affairs on the great player's return to health.

Three
Champions !

The apparent anomaly of there being no less than three players, each of whom can positively claim the title of Champion,—John Roberts (indisputably the Spot-barred Champion), W. J. Peall (the Billiard Association All-in Champion), and William Mitchell (the Billiard Association Spot-barred Champion), though it is to be regretted, cannot well be dispensed with.

Extraordinary
break by
Diggle.

At the moment of going to press Edward Diggle has gone far to justify our predictions. In his big match with Roberts, he made, on January 4, 1895, the extraordinary break of 985 ! This, besides being, of course, by far the highest spot-barred run ever made except by the Champion, is absolutely the largest break ever compiled in London, and *the third best on record*. It was made, too, upon a "Standard" table, which, of course, greatly enhances its value.

On the following day the same player amazed the whole Billiard world with a performance scarcely less marvellous. Nursing the balls with consummate skill, he compiled a series of 168 cannons, thus putting in the shade the great run made by John Roberts in Pretoria.

Diggle makes
the cannon
record.

This is not meant to be anything like an exhaustive history of great performances by Roberts or any other player. It is merely meant to interest the reader who takes an average interest in Billiards. I think I have made mention, in one way or another, of nearly all the chief players of the day.

My task is now completed. I have tried to make as clear as possible, in the simplest possible language, the principles or elements of the game of Billiards. I shall feel more than repaid, if I shall have been the means of throwing light on any difficulties existing in

the mind of any novice who shall have followed me through these pages. It now only remains for me to call "*Game!*"

APPENDIX.

THE RULES OF BILLIARDS.

THE games of Billiards, Pool, and Pyramids are now controlled by the Rules of the Billiard Association. Association of Great Britain and Ireland, a body which, formed in 1885, is doing a very good work. These rules practically cover any case ever likely to arise in actual play, and are undoubtedly the best rules ever yet published. They were compiled and approved by the following well-known professional players : John Roberts, Junior (the Champion), who took the chair, William Cook (ex-Champion), deceased, Joseph Bennett (ex-Champion), John Roberts, Senior (ex-Champion), deceased, William Mitchell, W. J. Peall, Tom Taylor, John North, J. G. Sala, George Collins, D. Richards, and Fred Bennett, a committee whose names should be sufficient guarantee of their competence to lay down the law on any single point connected with the game of Billiards.

A competent committee.

Special attention may be drawn to those rules of Billiards about which there is often doubt or misunderstanding.

Rule 4.

Rule 4 is quite an innovation on the old rule. Formerly, when either of the white balls was on or near the billiard or red spot, and the red ball was pocketed or forced off the table, the red ball, for which there was no room on its own proper spot, had to be put on the *middle* spot. Rule 4 has now laid down that the red must be placed on the *pyramid* spot, and, *only if that be occupied as well as the red spot*, on the *middle* spot.

Rules 6
and 41.

If a player, after having once commenced, neglects or refuses to continue when called upon by his opponent or the referee to play, *deliberately obstructs* his opponent, or *wilfully interferes with* the run of the balls, he shall lose the game.

Rules 7 to 15.

The method of scoring is briefly as follows. A winning or losing hazard counts *three* if made from the red, *two* if made from the opponent's ball. A cannon counts *two* points. A miss counts *one* to the opponent.

If a player cannons and pockets his own ball as well, the losing hazard thus made is counted from the object-ball *first* struck in making the cannon. Winning hazards made at the same time of course count as usual.

Rule 16.

If a player in making a cannon strikes the two object-balls simultaneously, any other score made by the same stroke counts as if the *white ball* had been struck first.

Rules 19
and 20.

If a player, *after striking the object-ball*, forces any ball, or balls, off the table, it counts *two* to his opponent in any case. If a score is made it does not count, and his opponent breaks the balls.

If, *after a miss*, the striker's ball is forced off the table, or into a pocket, the stroke counts *three* to his opponent, and is called a *coup*.

It is a stroke if a player, *in taking aim*, causes Rules 21, 23, his ball to strike another, or if, *in the act of striking*, and 29. he merely touches his own ball, even though, in playing from hand, it should not go out of baulk. In the latter case the opponent can, if he chooses, have the stroke played again.

All strokes not played with the point of the cue Rule 22. are foul.

If a striker plays with the wrong ball, his opponent can either—play with either ball—make his adversary play his stroke again, the same to be foul —or break, or let his opponent break, the balls. If he plays with his adversary's ball, he must use it all through the game.

If, however, the error is not discovered until Rule 26. after the next stroke, the balls are merely changed.

No score counts by foul strokes, which are made Rules 30 by touching any ball, impeding or accelerating *in* and 31. *any way* the progress of a ball, playing with a wrong ball (as explained above), or by lifting *both* feet from the ground whilst striking.

If the centre of the object-ball be out of Rule 33. baulk, a player (in hand) can strike it on the baulk side without his own ball necessarily leaving baulk.

When the balls are not playable, the striker's Rules 34 ball from hand must strike a cushion in order to and 35. score. If it, before doing so, touches either of the object-balls, the stroke is foul.

If, again, a player, in giving a miss, should strike his ball more than once, the stroke is foul.

In both these cases the opponent can, if he chooses, have the balls replaced and the stroke played again, such stroke, if successful, of course counting and the break being continued.

Rule 36.

Rule 36 is another quite new one. When the striker's ball touches one or both of the object-balls, the red must be spotted and the opponent's ball placed on the middle spot, the striker going on from hand. Touching this rule, we saw a ludicrous mistake made not long ago by a marker in a public room. A stroke was made which put down the opponent's ball and cannoned. The striker's ball was left touching the red ball. The marker, literally interpreting this rule 36, decided that the opponent's ball had to be taken out of the pocket and spotted on the middle spot. We were appealed to, and decided that of course the opponent's ball was a "dead" ball, and could only be in play when the non-striker should play in his turn, the red ball alone being spotted, and the striker playing from baulk. This, we take it, is the common sense reading of the rule, and few, we should imagine, would make a similar mistake to the marker's.

**Rules 39
and 40.**

If any person other than a player should either stop or interfere with a ball, or, by interference with a player, cause him to move a ball, the ball must be replaced by the referee.

Rule 42.

The "quill" stroke is now disallowed. In the early part of the century this stroke was the chief medium by which so-called large breaks were made.

It was made when the object-ball was very nearly a "line-ball," the cue-ball being gently pushed past it into one or other of the bottom pockets. It was a pretty stroke, and required a great deal of practice.

A spot-stroke is a red winning hazard, made either from the spot or the pyramid spot into one of the *top* pockets. In a spot-barred game only one such hazard is allowed. Should a player make two consecutive spot-strokes, the second hazard, unless another score is made by the same stroke, does not count, and his opponent follows on.

This rule refers to the stupid "jamb" stroke, Rule 44. which however is only partially covered. We would strongly urge the desirability of *totally* disallowing the use of it.

Cannons made in this way are not Billiards in any shape. So much do professional players recognize this that in the articles of agreement, governing every important match, a special clause is inserted, prohibiting the use of this absurd stroke.

This is an important alteration. Formerly, when a player was using any of the rests, he used to be able to ask the marker or a spectator how far he was "off" his ball. Now he must exercise his own judgment in the matter. He can, of course, however, place the cue (or butt) and the rest on the table, and walk round and make his own calculations.

By this rule any spectator who sees the game wrongly marked is allowed to state the fact, whether appealed to or not.

Rule 49.

The referee decides *all* disputes. If, however, he is in ignorance as to the matter in dispute, the majority of the spectators must decide the case. If no referee be appointed, the decision of the marker spotting the ball shall be final.

We have here given the principal points in the rules of Billiards. There are, however, others of minor importance to be observed, and we must state emphatically our opinion that the Billiard Association Rules of Billiards, Pool, and Pyramids should be framed and hung for adoption in every Billiard-room, whether public, club, or private.

The
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In 1892 the Billiard Association very wisely introduced the "Standard" table. The width of the pockets was (*inter alia*) fixed at $3\frac{5}{8}$ in. *at the fall of the slate*, their uniform size and shape in all respects being regulated by a template adopted by the Association. The height of the table, too, which curiously enough had never before been made the subject of legislation, was fixed between the limits of 2 ft. $9\frac{1}{2}$ in., and 2 ft. 10 in. to the top of the cushions.

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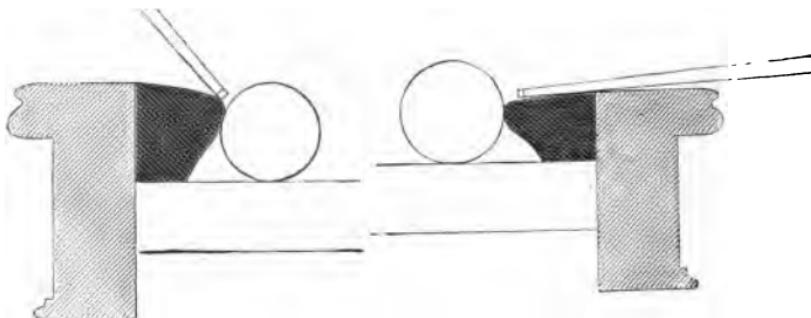
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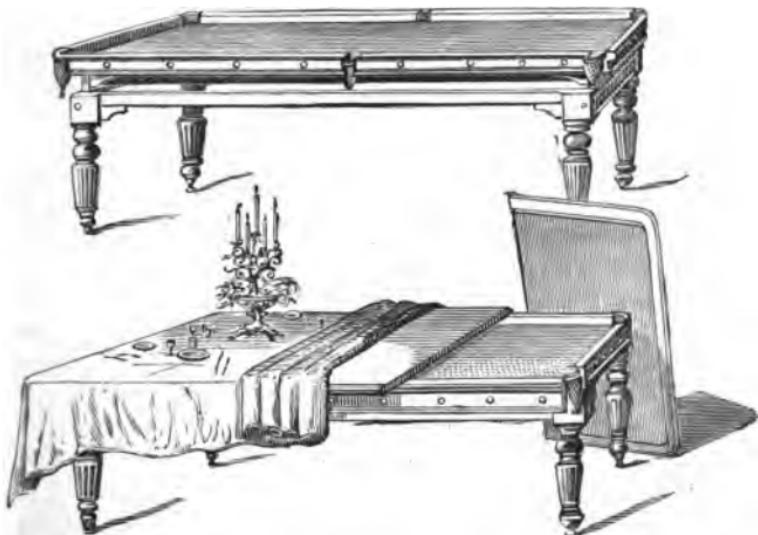
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R.A.

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